
THE WORLD WAR II ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT'S GOVERNMENT-OWNED CONTRACTOR-OPERATED (GOCO) INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES: BADGER ORDNANCE WORKS TRANSCRIPTS OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

interviews conducted by
Deborah L. Crown
of
BEAR CREEK ARCHEOLOGY, INC.

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**U.S. ARMY MATERIEL COMMAND HISTORIC CONTEXT SERIES
REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS
NUMBER 2C**



GEO-MARINE, INC.



**US Army Corps
of Engineers
Fort Worth District**

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<p>This report presents the transcripts of oral history interviews conducted as part of an effort to document the construction and World War II-era operations of the Badger Army Ammunition Plant (BAAP), Baraboo, Wisconsin. This project was undertaken as part of a larger Legacy Resource Program demonstration project to assist small installations and to aid in the completion of mitigation efforts set up in a 1993 Programmatic Agreement among the Army Materiel Command, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Multiple State Historic Preservation Officers concerning a program to cease maintenance, excess, and dispose of particular properties. As part of the larger project to develop the national historic context of seven sample installations on a state and local level, the major focus of the project at BAAP was to document the impacts that the facility had on the state and local environments.</p> <p>The project was conducted by Bear Creek Archeology, Inc., under subcontract to Geo-Marine, Inc., during February 1995. Duane Peter, Senior Archeologist at Geo-Marine, Inc., served as Principal Investigator. Deborah L. Crown conducted the oral history interviews.</p>						
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**THE WORLD WAR II ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT'S
GOVERNMENT-OWNED CONTRACTOR-OPERATED
(GOCO) INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES:**

**BADGER ORDNANCE WORKS
TRANSCRIPTS OF
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS**

interviews conducted by
Deborah L. Crown
BEAR CREEK ARCHEOLOGY, INC.
Cresco, Iowa
Subcontractor for Geo-Marine, Inc.

Principal Investigator
Duane E. Peter
Geo-Marine, Inc.

under
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NUMBER 2C

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

This report contains transcripts of oral history interviews conducted as part of a project to document the World War II-era construction and operations of the Badger Army Ammunition Plant (BAAP), Baraboo, Wisconsin. The interviews were conducted under United States Army Corps of Engineers Contract No. DACA63-93-D-0014, Delivery Order No. 014; the transcriptions of these interviews were completed under United States Army Corps of Engineers Contract No. DACA63-93-D-0014, Delivery Order No. 89. Both these projects were undertaken as part of a larger Legacy Resource Program demonstration project to assist small installations and to aid in the completion of mitigation efforts set up in a 1993 Programmatic Agreement among the Army Materiel Command, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Multiple State Historic Preservation Officers concerning a program to cease maintenance, excess, and dispose of particular properties. As part of the larger project to develop the national historic context of seven sample installations on a state and local level, the major focus of the project at BAAP was to document the impacts that the facility had on the state and local environments during the World War II period.

All the interviews were conducted by Bear Creek Archeology, Inc. (BCA), under subcontract to Geo-Marine, Inc., during February 1995, and the tapes of these interviews were transcribed by the personnel at Professional Transcription Service, Dallas, Texas. Duane Peter, Senior Archeologist at Geo-Marine, Inc., served as Principal Investigator.

Deborah L. Crown, of BCA, conducted the oral history interviews. All six of the interviewees—Mr. Floyd Allen, Mrs. Dorothy Bohnsack, Ms. Laverna Hackett, Mr. Elroy Hirsch, Ms. Dorothy Krueger, and Mr. Howard Rittman—worked at BAAP during World War II, when the facility was known as Badger Ordnance Works (BOW), and each provided invaluable information concerning everyday life at the powder production facility. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and was recorded using a high quality tape recorder.

Mr. Floyd Allen, long-time resident of Baraboo, was interviewed at his home. His wife was present for the interview, but offered few comments. During World War II, Mr. Allen worked on construction of BOW and then worked in the Nitric Acid area as a pumper. He also worked as a painter at BOW and at "Staff Village." He returned to the plant during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts.

The interview with Ms. Dorothy Bohnsack was conducted at her home in Sauk City, Wisconsin. During World War II, Ms. Bohnsack handled accounts payable in the administrative department at BOW. She is a lifetime resident of the area and lived in her present house during World War II. She returned to work at the plant when the United States became involved in Korea and Vietnam.

The interview with Ms. Laverna Hackett took place in her home in Baraboo. Ms. Hackett and her late husband lived in Badger Village during World War II and both worked at BOW. She was a chemical lab driver, or "sample runner," during that war. She too returned to work at the plant during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Mr. Elroy Hirsch was interviewed in his home in Madison, Wisconsin. Before World War II, Mr. Hirsch was a student and well-known football player (often called "Crazy Legs") at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. When World War II began, he joined the Marine Corps and, while waiting to be shipped overseas, took a job as a guard at the plant. After the war, he played professional football with the Los Angeles Rams, and later became Athletic Director for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a position he held for 18 years.

The interview with Ms. Dorothy Krueger was conducted in her home in West Baraboo. Before taking a job at the plant she had mainly worked only in the home. During her tenure at BOW, she was assigned to stations on several of the facility's production lines. After World War II she returned to her home to be with her family.

Mr. Howard Rittman was interviewed in his home in nearby Portage, Wisconsin. Like Mr. Allen, he worked at the plant during the construction phase. He was a lab technician during the war, and also returned to work during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts.

The contributions provided by these individuals have been invaluable. The time and effort they took to participate in the project is greatly appreciated.

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FLOYD ALLEN
February 14, 1995
Baraboo, Wisconsin
Deborah L. Crown, Interviewer

Today is Tuesday, February 14, 1995, and this is Deborah Crown. I'm interviewing Floyd Allen, and this is Side 1.

How long have you lived in this area?

I've lived ever since I was about eight years old, which makes it about 72 years.

Where were you living when you heard that the plant was going to be built?

Right here.

In this house?

In this house.

How long had you lived in this house when you found out the plant was going to be built?

Helen Allen: [Inaudible].

Floyd Allen: Yeah, that's right.

Helen Allen: [Inaudible].

Floyd Allen: What was that question again?

How long were you in this house when you heard the plant was going to be built?

Well, actually when we first heard of it, we hadn't moved in here yet.

But you were still in Baraboo?

Oh, yeah.

Were you working or going to school then?

Working.

And what did you do?

I was with outdoor advertising, bill boards.

How much were you getting paid at the time?

Probably about 30, 35 dollars a week.

What were economic conditions like at that time in the area, like how much did it cost to buy a house then?

Well, of course it was a whole lot less than it is now. You could buy an average house for \$5,000.

What was the reaction of most people in this area when they heard that the government was buying that land out there for a plant?

Well, the average person was pretty happy about it, but a lot of the farmers, where they had to sell their land, they didn't like it. A lot of them had lived there all their life, you know, and they didn't want to give up their farms. But for the people here in town, it was going to be a big thing, a big economic boom, and they were pretty happy.

Did anyone in your family own any land that was going to be purchased out there?

No.

Do you think that most of those people were paid enough so that they could buy land that was comparable to what they had before, or was there a lot of complaining about it?

There was a lot of complaining, yeah. A lot of them figured they didn't get enough money for their places. But actually I don't know whether, you know, whether that was fair price or not.

Did you ever see the area during the construction?

Oh, yes.

And can you described the conditions at the construction site?

It was a mess. (Laughs) They were building roads, putting in power lines, water lines, everything was dug up. I worked for a short time on construction down there. Well, the person that was familiar with that part of the country wouldn't have recognized it. I mean it was totally uprooted and there was a tremendous amount of work outside of the buildings that was done down there, all the roads and steam lines and all that. It was just kind of--anybody that walked in on it, you'd think it was just chaos, because you didn't know what was going on. They had it all on their blueprints, but if you didn't have them, you had no idea what it was going to be like.

What did you do during construction?

I was working with the cement contractor. Mason Hanger was the general contractor, but they sublet a lot of work, and all of the concrete work was sublet to an outfit from New York. Norton, I believe their name was. And I worked for them, for this Norton.

Did most of the workers live around here or were they from somewhere else, most of the construction workers?

The construction workers come largely from other places. There just wasn't enough available locally. I don't know where they all come from, but a lot of them were--they didn't move their families in here, because they knew it would be short term, and there was a big demand for just rooms, if they could get a bed for the night and possibly board with it. But I don't know, they just come from all over.

Did they live in town or at the site?

No, there was no accommodations for them down there on the plant site. They lived not only in Baraboo, all these small towns around, oh, [a] 50, 60 mile radius. They was coming in from all over.

Did any of them live near you or with you?

Helen Allen: That was during that time. Thompson's [inaudible].

Floyd Allen: Thompsons were . . . Yeah, that's right. That was World War II. Yeah, we rented out one room to a man and his wife. Ellen packed his lunch for him, and the lady stayed here and she had lunch at noon. Then they went out at night for supper. But they stayed for what? Six months, eight months.

Was that during the construction, then?

Floyd Allen: I don't remember if they was still working the construction or not. He worked for the government. He was in the army, actually, and he had some kind of a job with the . . .

Helen Allen: It was in '45 they was with us.

Floyd Allen: Well, then the construction would have been pretty well over.

But he was working with the army, then?

Yeah.

How did the local people get along with the people that were from elsewhere? All of a sudden there were more people in here.

Swamped, yeah. Oh, I think pretty well. I don't recall them being any big problem.

Were there many people that came in to work on construction or that were here that worked on construction that were of a different race?

Not too many. At one time, after the plant was built, they had trouble getting enough help for operations, and they built some barracks down there on the plant site, and they brought in a bunch of Jamaicans, and they were here for oh, probably a year or so. I don't remember just how long it was, but it still wasn't much a problem, I don't think, racially. They stayed pretty much on the plant site. They'd have to come into town for groceries and like that, but I don't recall any real problems.

During the construction of the plant, what did people do in the evenings or on weekends for fun?

Well, of course, some of them would go home for the weekends, but the theater was swamped most of the time. If you wanted to go to a movie, you had to stand in line to get in. Of course, that was true in the grocery store or wherever you went, you were standing in line, because well, at the height of production, there was about 7,000 people working on production, and there was about that many more on construction. And you dump all that load in here, you know, on these small towns, and we were really a boom town, (chuckles) with all the problems that go with it.

Were there more houses built here when all those people moved in here, or did they generally just live with people that already . . . ?

Well, most of them lived in just whatever housing was available. Well, of course, right during the war, materials were so hard to get a hold of, you know, you couldn't hardly buy a stick of lumber at the lumber yard. So the construction, as far as home building, didn't really start till after the war was over. And it's been going on ever since.

So you said you were working at a bill board company before the plant was built?

M-hm.

First of all, how did you find out about your construction job, and then how did you end up working at the plant during production?

Well, of course, it come out in the paper that they was going--the headlines, and I don't know if we've still got that paper. We had it for a long time, that they was going to build this plant at Merrimac. That was 65 million dollars. And, of course, I'd worked at this job for several years. In fact, it was about the first steady job I ever had. And I didn't really intend to quit my job to go down there, because I knew it was going to be temporary, and I sat around thinking about it all one summer, and finally decided that wasn't the job I wanted for permanent anyway I might just as well go down there, and of course, hourly wages, I mean they was considerably higher than what the local places were paying. I thought I might just as well go down there and make a little money, and I could always find that good of a job afterwards. So I thought about it for quite a while. Well, I put in an application with Hercules for a job in production, but things hadn't started to move yet. They weren't in production, and so while I was waiting for my name to come up with Hercules, why, I thought I might just as well go down there for a while on the construction, with the idea of quitting that as soon as I could get in with Hercules. So that's what happened. I only worked for probably six weeks on construction. And then Hercules called me.

Before you started working in production there, what did you think the job would be like? What did you think you'd be doing there?

Well, of course, nobody knew what a powder plant was like. Nobody around here had ever seen one. And I had no idea. I had visions of one big, large factory type thing, instead of sprawled out the way it turned out. I didn't have any idea what I would be doing. Of course my old job I had, it was practically all outside, and in the wintertime, I was getting pretty sick of that working outside, and I thought at least I could be in where it was warm. That was one of the big things. I certainly didn't think I'd be there--spend 30 years of my life down there.

So why was it that you wanted to work there?

Mainly economics. It was more money. I just about doubled my wages between what I was getting, and of course, on construction, you were figured to work a ten-hour day. That was a normal day, and six days a week, that was expected, and if you wanted to work seven, you could. I mean they was hurting for help. So you could put in--and I did a time or two--put in 70 hours.

During construction?

Yeah. But with Hercules, of course, there again we had to work six days a week, and this was shift work that I was on, round the clock, seven days a week, so we would work for seven days and then have the eighth day off. And so each week your day off was a day later. When it come the weekend, then you'd get

Saturday and Sunday together. But of course, we had to alternate three shifts. We'd work two weeks on each shift and then change.

So how many shifts were there?

Well, there was three shifts a day.

Do you remember what times those were from?

I think it was 8:00 to 4:00 to 12:00 and to 8:00 again.

It was operating seven days a week then?

Yeah.

In which building did you work?

Well, it was in the acid area, which comprised a number of buildings, but my job was a pumper, transferring the acid from one place to another, one building to another, from one tank to another. So I made the rounds.

You said your job was a pumper?

M-hm.

So what would you do on an average day? Just if you could describe a typical day from when you got there to when you left.

Well, it was quite a variety of things. Sometimes it was loading up acid. The oleum plant was the first thing in operation down here, and there was a big shortage all over the country. That oleum, that's a real concentrated sulphuric acid. And they was shipping that out to other plants that didn't have an oleum plant, but still that is quite a necessary ingredient for the powder. And we shipped out many, many car loads of oleum once it got in production. But then in turn they would get in tank cars of a weak sulphuric acid that had been used and adulterated, and so we would have to unload that. And ammonia was a big thing. That was the basic part of your nitric acid. It burned the ammonia, which made nitric. And we'd have to unload that. And then the last year or so that I worked down there, I just worked straight days, and that was transferring the nitric acid from the acid area out to the cotton lines, where they'd use it for mixing with their cotton lender to make the . . .

How did that fit into the overall production of the final product? What stage was that that you were working on during World War II?

Well, nitric acid was the finished product from the acid area, and that's what was used for nitrating the cotton lenders. They'd get in big bales of cotton just about like it come from the field, you know, just a fluff, and treat it with the nitric acid and that would make the nitric cotton, which was the basis of the smokeless powder. After the smokeless was in operation, then they built a rocket powder line, which was, again, about as big as the original part. And there that was used for rocket propellants, but that had nitroglycerin mixed with the nitro-cotton. And of course they made the nitroglycerin out there, too. But that was the first step, you might say, in producing the powder.

Was your job a union job or a non-union?

Not during World War II. We were not unionized. It was later.

During World War II, what were the working conditions like?

As to what . . .

Regarding how you got along with everybody there, what kind of employee relations?

Well, I got along. *(Laughs)* Never had any, you know, threat of strikes or anything like that. Of course, non-union, you couldn't do anything about that anyway. No, everybody was pretty conscious of contributing to the war effort. You know, they felt they were doing something good for the country, and I would say that everybody got along pretty good.

About how many people worked in your area? How many people would you have contact with during the day?

We'd probably have 20 or 25 in the area, just the acid area.

Was your job dangerous?

It could be, especially around that oleum. If you get just a little speck of acid on you, you were burnt before you could get it off of there, but of course safety was a big thing. I mean that was stressed constantly, and for the type of work it was, I'd say we had a very good safety record, but they did have some fatalities. There was some blowups down there, but for as many people that was there and for that type of an industry, I'd say it was a very good safety record.

Do you recall any serious accidents?

Yeah, I recall a nitroglycerin building blew up one time. There was four men in it at the time, and all they could find was little bits and pieces. They never did find a body. Guards went around and searched the whole area, and when they'd find a little bone or piece of flesh, they'd stick a red stake with a red flag on it, and they just gathered them up in pieces. I knew one of the fellows that was in there.

How would something like that happen?

Well, I don't know. It could be a lot of reasons for it, but if everybody followed the safety rules strictly, there shouldn't have been any, but some little slip up somewhere, and it could be something that some individual couldn't control, too. I don't know as they ever come up with the reason for that particular one.

Were there any minor accidents there?

Oh, yeah.

Like what kind of things would happen?

Oh, people on maintenance you know, you're using a saw or something like that, you know, you'd cut a finger or things like that. Practically no traffic accidents because you had a 25 mile an hour speed limit throughout the whole plant. So *(chuckles)* that was pretty safe.

Was there a particular area of the plant that was considered more dangerous than the rest of it?

I would say the nitroglycerin. That was the most dangerous of the whole thing. And there, if you had an accident, it was generally going to be pretty serious. That stuff is very touchy. But of course there was the

chance, I mean any place where you got powder, explosives, you know, there's a chance, but they took every possible precaution.

So did they talk to people when they first started working there?

Oh, yes. Yeah, you had indoctrination, as far as safety rules go, and that was a constant thing. Practically every week you'd have a meeting, you know, to talk about safety.

And who would talk at those meetings? The supervisors or was there a . . . ?

Well, we had a safety department that supposedly were specialists in the safety . . . most of them got their training right there at the plant. But of course supervision would come in on that, too.

Was there any special clothing that people had to wear?

Yeah. Well, practically everybody. You had, like in the acid area, everything was wool, wool shirts, wool pants, because that takes a little longer for acid to burn through that than what it does like cotton. Cotton, it just (*spew*) right through it. But wool, it, you know, was a little protection. We bought our clothes down there.

You had to buy them?

Yeah. But we got them at a pretty reasonable price, and you were allowed I think a shirt and pants, something like one pair every three months. Generally, you'd have them pretty well burnt full of holes by that time. (*Laughs*)

Were there any special shoes?

Yeah. You had to wear a steel-toed shoe. And then like on the powder lines, they had what they called a powder shoe. It was I guess some kind of a ground in them that it kept from building up static electricity in your body, that those shoes was supposed to . . . but anywhere in the plant, you had to wear the safety toed shoes.

So the shoes you wore were different than the other ones?

Yeah. We didn't wear the powder shoes. It wasn't that conductive type thing, but they still had the steel capped toes. And not a high shoe, but not an oxford. They were ankle height.

Did you ever hear anything about people in the community not ever feeling safe, from maybe they were afraid of blow ups or chemicals or . . . ?

Yeah, I think some of them were a little dubious about it, but of course the way those buildings were built down there, you never had any large concentration of powder in any one building. You had a lot of buildings with a little bit in each one. And they had these barricades built up around the building, filled with earth, so in case of an explosion, it all went up, you know, instead of spreading out and knocking down the building next to it.

What was the building like that you were in? Can you describe it?

Well, it was, of course, I say, I was in a number of buildings there, but there were not explosive. I mean they didn't have to have the barricades and everything. They were just plain frame buildings.

Was what you did assembly line type work or was it different than that?

No, as I say, it was just transferring the acid from one place to another through pumps. You had overhead lines and you pumped it to wherever it was supposed to go.

Was this your first time ever to do this type of work, or had you done this before?

No. I would say that nobody in the plant had ever done anything like that before. (Laughs) Never been that kind of an industry around here.

Was this the first time that you'd worked for a large company?

Yeah.

And was that a significant change from working for a smaller company?

Oh much, yeah. Of course you had the time clock to punch, which I'd never done before. I went and come more and less (laughs) on my own, you know. Oh, yes, it was a lot of difference. Of course, that was also the first time I'd ever worked where you had the fringe benefits like vacations and holidays and insurance and all that kind of stuff.

Did you have good benefits there?

Yeah. Well, now in World War II, that was a lot different than when I was working for [inaudible]. In fact, I don't know as we had health insurance.

Helen Allen: When the kids were born, we paid for all of [inaudible].

Floyd Allen: Yeah, that's right. I get a little confused. I mean this was 50 years ago, and then in the more recent years, things were a lot different.

So recently, [inaudible] they give benefits and all that?

Oh, they had very good benefits and . . .

But Hercules, it wasn't like that?

No.

Was your work stressful or not? Was there a lot of pressure to work quickly or not?

No. I wouldn't say so. I guess the only thing that I'd say was stressful is that graveyard shift. I never did get used to going to work at midnight and working all night long. I never learned to sleep in the daytime. So at the end of that two weeks, I was kind of bushed. But, no, as far as the job itself, you know, if you kept awake, you know, and kept your mind on what you were doing . . . but it was different than an assembly line, where you've got to be right on the ball. You had to take what time you needed, but . . .

What do you think about your part in the defense effort during World War II?

Well, it was just a necessary thing that had to be done. Although it wasn't any great sense of patriotism or something that I went down there. I went down there for the money. (Laughs)

What do you think about the plant's role in the defense effort during World War II? Do you think it was very important or not?

Oh, I think it was. If I remember right, they were putting out up to three million pounds of powder a day down there, and it was used, you know. Of course, there was a number of other plants just like it around the country. Radford had one, I think out in Kansas they had one, but they made powder for a lot of different types of ammunition, from 30 caliber machine guns, 50 caliber and your Howitzer, up to I think 105 millimeter canon was the biggest thing they made powder for, but they burned up an awful lot of it over there.

What kind of people worked at the plant, like were there a lot of women that worked there?

In production, yes.

How would you say what was the percentage of women versus men there?

Gosh, I don't know. Some of the buildings there was probably 50%, but then there was certain jobs that, well, I felt women shouldn't be doing. I mean there was just too heavy, hard work to . . . but on the powder lines, there was a lot of women there. I really couldn't say the percentage.

You said there were some people from Jamaica around for a while?

Yeah.

Were there any other . . . ?

I've often remarked about it. We had very few Blacks that worked down there. Quite a few Indians, but very small percentage of Blacks, and I don't know why. There was equal opportunity. They'd take anybody they could get there for a long time. They was so short of help, they weren't turned away, but why they didn't come in, I don't know. But we had very few Blacks, outside of those Jamaicans.

But you said there were a lot of Indians there?

Quite a few of them from up around the Dells.

Did some of them work on construction, too, or were they mostly just working during production?

Well, like I say, I wasn't really with construction long enough to get a good picture of that. They probably were, probably did work there, but anybody could get a job. If you could stand up and walk, why, you'd be hired. They'd take anybody that come along.

Was there any tension between the Indians and the other people?

I don't think so. There's a few of the fellows that I knew from up at the Dells who were just naturally kind of anti-Indian, but that goes on all the time. (Laughs)

Did the plant provide any sort of day care or anything for women that had children?

No, not that I know of.

Do you know what they did with their children during the day?

Probably sent them to their grandma's house. *(Laughs)*

Was there a plant newspaper or a Hercules paper?

Yeah, *(Olin?)* did and I've got quite a few of those. I don't believe Hercules put out a paper like that. I don't recall.

But (Olin?) did?

M-hm.

What kind of articles did that paper contain? I suppose this is later, now?

Yeah. Just general information of interest to the people that's worked there. Oh, they'd have birthdays and stuff like that, or if you took a vacation, where you went, and some more technical stuff about improvements or something that might have been made there on plant site, and that type of thing. Yeah, I still get a paper from down there.

Were there some jobs that only men did or only women did?

Well, in our particular case, in the acid area, there was no women outside the office. You had a couple girls in the office, but the actual the production work, there was no women in our area. I don't believe there was any in the nitroglycerin area. But on the powder lines was where they did a lot of . . .

Was that safer or not?

Probably somewhat, yeah. But not quite as much physical labor to it.

Did they have any morale boosting programs like promotions or things to get people involved in the war effort?

Oh, not much that I recall. Of course, they was great on pushing buying war bonds.

How did they do that?

Well, they put the pressure on you. They wanted everybody, the whole area to be 100 percent in participation, you know. They kind of put the squeeze on you to sign up, and then it was deducted from your checks, you know. But I think that was pretty well accepted. Most people, I think, was buying at least a token amount, and we got quite into it. I mean that was a good way of saving. When you don't get it in your pocket in the first place, why, it's a lot easier to save money. In about two years time or so, we saved up enough in bonds for the down payment on our house here.

Do you remember if the plant received any Army/Navy E Awards?

I'm sure they did. I know they got a lot of safety awards. I think I recall that they got some awards for, you know, keeping up on their production and all, whatever, but I, as I say, during World War II, I wasn't quite into it as much as I was afterwards. With Olin, when they unionized, why I was our shop steward. Of course, I was on maintenance for Olin. I went down as a painter, and I was our shop steward, and then they had 11 different unions down there, all united as a council, we called it, and I was secretary and treasurer for that council for about eight years. So, as I say, I got into a little more the details through that,

and during World War II, I just didn't get much involved in . . . just went down, punched my time card, (*chuckles*) and did my work and come home.

That's almost an answer to the next question. Did your ideas about working there change with time? How did you get more involved in working there?

Well, of course, as I say, in later years, like when I went back there in '51 for the Korean War, I figured it'd be another two or three years operation and then it'd be gone again, but I stayed on and on and on, till it got to after Vietnam, by then I began to look at it as a (*chuckles*) permanent job that I would retire from, which I did in '78.

So what did you do during Korea and during Vietnam, then?

I was a painter.

So how did your job end after World War II?

Well, just a few days after Japan surrendered, why the word come through to shut the place down. And of course when they built it, they was only figuring on us operating about five years, and so of course, at the end of World War II, they just shut it right down, and they didn't even do too much in maintenance down there for a number of years, and it deteriorated pretty bad.

Was it on standby or was it just shut . . . ?

Yeah, it was on standby, but it was very, very little actual repair work. You know, the roofs went bad and buildings started to rot out, there were just kind of temporary buildings. They're all frame buildings in the first place and it began to rot down, machinery began to rust. And so when the Korean War started, they got a general contractor in there again, and I think it must've cost them just about much to rehabilitate the thing as it did to build it in the first place. There was an awful lot of work. But then after Korea, then they maintained it in the shape of readiness. They figured they could put it back on operation in about 30 days if they had to, and they kept it up. Until now, very recently, now they're beginning to have their doubts about it, and there's just a handful of people working down there now, again.

Do you remember when your job ended exactly?

Well, I quit. It was in August of that year, just a few days that they got the word that they would close it down, because right then I had the chance to go back on the old job I had before, and I could have stayed. As it turned out, probably would have stayed all that winter, but they told us, they said if you want to quit now, you'll get your benefits, your severance pay, your vacation pay, and whatever, but if you don't quit now, then you'll have to stay until we lay you off in order to get your benefits. And I figured well that might be in the middle of the winter and who knows when, you know, and so I quit.

What was the reaction in this community when you had all these people that were here for working there . . . where did they go when the plant shut down after World War II? Did they stay or did they . . . ?

Some of them stayed, some of them went back, I guess, to wherever they come from.

Was it hard to find jobs outside the plant after it closed?

I would say it was, yeah. Before they built it, about the only industry we had in Baraboo was the [*inaudible*] mills out there. That was the only big employer we had. But right after the war, then they started promoting the city bought this land for industrial park down there and they started . . .

(end of side 1; beginning of side 2)

This is Tuesday, February 14th, 1995. This is Deborah Crown interviewing Floyd Allen, and this is side 2. Okay, you were talking about the industry.

Well, following World War II, then we've got quite an assortment of . . . oh, some hired two, three, four hundred people, but we didn't have any of that. So yeah, there was quite a lull there for a while. Till these places got started, why, jobs were pretty scarce.

You talked a little bit about this before, but how did the pay at the plant compare to the jobs outside of the plant?

On average, it was one of the better paying places outside of Madison. When I was on the council there with the union, I got into the negotiations with the company on wages and they would make a survey, the company did, of all the local industries, and they'd always say well we're paying a lot better, but they never included Madison, because then *(laughs)* that was up again, you know. But it was better than average of the local industries for similar jobs.

During World War II, were people saving their money or were they spending their money?

We did, but I don't know. A lot of them spent it, too. But we was always the more frugal minded. You know, we were brought up that way, and we've never quite gotten over it, even yet. So we saved considerable money during the war years.

What about other people in the area? What were they spending their money on?

Whatever, cars, their homes. I don't know.

Were there any problems with children, during the war years, with teenagers or anything that you can recall?

I don't think any worse then than we still have. You know, a lot of vandalism and like that from kids, but I don't think it was any worse during the war than it is now.

Did the people that came here from somewhere else to work at the plant during the war, did they mix with the people that were already here or did they tend to keep separate?

Oh I think they was kind of assimilated, from what I know. I had a cousin from out Minnesota that come down here, moved his family down. Of course, after the plant closed up, they went back. But I think they mixed in pretty good with the locals.

What did people do for entertainment during the operation of the plant?

Well, there wasn't a whole lot come right down to it. You know, gas was rationed, you know, you had just barely enough gas to do the necessary things. You couldn't take trips and things like that. All we had in town was the theater for entertainment. Oh, I suppose there was a few dances and things like that. We never was into that crowd, so I don't know just . . . bowling, of course we had a bowling alley. That accommodated some. In the summer time, of course, we had the lake out there for picnics and swimming, boating, fishing and that type of thing.

Did people gamble?

I guess there was a little in the back rooms of some of the taverns and like that, but it was illegal, so you didn't hear a whole lot about it. That was even before the days of bingo, so . . . (Laughs)

Did the plant plan any recreational activities for people?

Not during that time, I don't think they did. Later on, they formed a conservation club that there was trap shooting, they restocked the area with pheasant and stuff like that, and I guess they had . . . I didn't belong to this club, but I think they had a monthly get together.

That was for employees that worked there, then?

Yeah.

Did the local community have any recreational things going on?

Oh, I guess just the usual type of thing, just your card parties. We didn't have no real entertainment centers in town. There just wasn't any. As I say, outside of the theater and bowling alleys, there wasn't much to do. You had to make your own recreation.

Was temporary housing set up anywhere for people that came into the area? Other than living in other people's homes, was there a place that they all lived?

Not here in town. They had what they called [inaudible] Village down there at the plant for some of the top echelon of, you know, management, and then they had built some barrack type buildings, which are still down there. But they've been converted now. The government sold them, and they were converted to condominiums. And they had built barracks for these Jamaicans when they brought them in. And then there was a lot of little single family units. It was all government, though. They built them down across the road that you could rent.

Across from the plant?

Yeah. But most of those, in fact all of the single family units, they was tore down and moved out of there. They're not there, but there's what they call Badger Village. That's still there. But of course, that was sold. It's in private hands now.

What kind of people lived there? Was it the workers that lived there?

[Inaudible].

Where was this other place that you were talking about at first? Staff Village you called it?

Staff Village. You're familiar with Badger Village. Well, it's straight on down the road, the first curve that you make that turns to the left there, right on that curve you can see them off to the right, right on that corner. Those are practically all still there, but of course, there again, it's individual, privately owned.

But it was upper management that lived there?

M-hm.

Did you know anybody that lived in either place, in the Staff Village or Badger Village?

Well, yeah. As I say, I was a painter and we used to have to go over to this Staff Village. Every time anybody moved there, why, you went in, you painted the whole house and especially like your kitchens, the paint built up about that thick on your walls and cupboards and like that. Because everybody had to have a fresh paint job, you know. But I knew some of the people that lived there, that was working there at the time. I don't know anybody that lives there now.

What about in Badger Village? Did you know anybody then that lived there?

A few, yeah.

Were you painting over there, too, sometimes?

I'm just trying to recall if that was even there during World War II, if that was built later. I don't recall ever working in those buildings over there.

How was health care in the area, during World War II, with all these new people? Was it affected?

The care?

Yeah.

Well, not because of the people. There was a shortage of materials in labor. That was one of the things why when I quit down there . . . well, as I say, I went back to my old job for about a year, and then I left that and I started out as a painting contractor on my own, and in the beginning, my work was mostly with farmers. I had a spray machine, and barns and roofs and all like that had been neglected during the war because of both labor and material shortage. So there was a big market for it. But around town here, I can't say as it was a great deal of difference.

Would you say that the Baraboo area, as far as morals or values changed at all during World War II?

I don't know that they changed here anymore than any place else, but I do think that in the last 50 years there's been a decay, if you want to call it that, in the moral standards of people in general. I mean there's a lot of things that are permissible now that wasn't at that time. But I don't think the war had anything to do with it. (Laughs)

Was there a curfew at night?

Not then. I don't know. Did we?

Helen Allen: No. There is now, 11:00 curfew.

There is now?

Helen Allen: Eleven o'clock for anybody under 16. Supposed to be.

I don't know just how strict they are, because 10:00 or 10:30, I'm already in bed, so I don't . . . (laughs).

Did anybody dislike the plant during World War II because it made munitions or powder?

Oh, yeah. We had a bomb attempt down there one time.

During World War II?

No, that was later. That was Vietnam I guess.

During World War II, were people . . . ?

Yeah. As I say, I get a little confused sometimes as just what time frame that was, but at one time, we had a sticker that you stuck on your bumper if you was driving to work regularly.

Was that for parking?

Well, yeah, but there was cases where, especially in Madison--I don't know whether it ever happened here in town or not--but cars were damaged that had one of them stickers on it.

During World War II?

It seems to me it was then.

Helen Allen: *[Inaudible]* sticker.

How about during Korea or Vietnam?

Korea wasn't so bad, but of course, you know, Vietnam, there was a lot of dissatisfaction there with the war, you know. A lot of people were unhappy that we were in it, and there was some opposition to this place out here. But not during World War II. I mean there everybody was in favor. Get more powder out, the better. But I say the biggest opposition was during Vietnam.

And what kinds of things did people do to show their opposition? Were there demonstrations?

We had one I remember of being called out to the gate there to . . . they had some you'd call them pickets I guess, some anti-war demonstrators that congregated out there at the main gate, and didn't do any damage, but there was, you know, just vocal opposition. But yelling, hollering at the people that drove into the plant, you know, how they do on these picket lines.

What about that bomb scare you were talking about?

Well, there was some kind of an incendiary bomb that the plane flew over and they was aiming at the power house down there, and it landed in a vacant field. It didn't hurt a thing. They missed their target.

But it blew up?

I don't know whether it even exploded. They found it out there in the field. A plane come flying low over it, and of course that power house, that was kind of the nerve center. If they took that out, why it'd knock everything out.

But it didn't do anything?

I don't remember whether they ever found out who that was or not. But no, it didn't do any damage.

Would you say that many of the women that worked at the plant worked outside the home before they had the job at the plant, or do you think that this was their first job outside working in [inaudible]?

I'm sure that a lot of them this was their first experience outside the home. We had a lot of farmers come in there. They still operated their farms in spare time, but they come in and put in their eight hours down there.

Farmers would?

M-hm. A lot of farmers.

So how did they manage . . . they worked at the plant eight hours a day and then also farmed?

Yeah. I don't know how they did it. Of course, I held two jobs for a good share of the time during World War II. The fellow I'd been working for, in this outdoor advertising, he was drafted into the army, and I was the only help he had. He'd been doing it himself after I left, but then he was drafted soon after that. But of course, the advertising business dropped off to, you know, . . . probably 90 percent of our business had been automobiles and gasoline and cigarettes. You couldn't buy cigarettes. Of course, they weren't rationed, but you couldn't hardly buy them anyway, because it was just a shortage and gasoline was rationed and cars, they didn't make for a couple of years. So what was left, after he was drafted, he come and asked me if I'd come back and work my, you know, spare time, just on kind of a piece work, do whatever there was to do. So I did that for couple years I guess.

While you were working at the plant?

Yeah. So, as I say, my day off, most of the time, come during the week. There wasn't much else to do anyway, so I went out and worked that day on that job, and in the summer time, it stayed light till eight, nine o'clock. You know, I could go out in the evening to some of these towns close by. We had about 20, 21 towns, something like that, that we covered. And the farmers, I suppose, were doing the same thing. They worked Saturdays and Sundays and evenings and put their kids to work.

Do you think many of the women wanted to keep working at the plant? Did a lot of them stay on when it was put on standby?

The ones who went on standby, outside of the offices, there just wasn't jobs for women. Oh, I'm sure a lot of them would have stayed, would like to have stayed. A lot of them worked in the labs and that. And I'm sure they would have stayed, but there just wasn't a place.

Did many find jobs outside of the plant after it was put on standby after World War II?

Well, a lot of these newer industries that we got in town here, they hired a lot of women, so there's a lot of them that are working . . . Helen, there, went to work after . . .

Helen Allen: Nineteen, sixty-five I went . . .

After the kids were gone, why, she went to work. She'd never worked, full-time that is, before. I don't dare say she didn't work, because I know house work is a full-time job if you want to do it.

What kind of jobs did women find after World War II?

Well, like where she was was a plastics . . . it was assembly line work and I always said that she worked three times as hard as I did for my money. Because assembly line work, that's just part of it. I mean you

got to keep up with the line and you don't have a chance for any let up. We had three plastics plants. I don't know. I imagine there's quite a few women work at the Sysco. I don't know just what they do. A lot of the foods and that are packaged there, aren't they?

Helen Allen: *[Inaudible]* they're mostly office *[inaudible]*.

Were there any labor shortages at the plant at any time?

Yeah, right at the peak of operations in World War II.

What did they do to . . . ?

Oh, I think they had quite an advertising campaign. They run buses to I'd say within a 60 mile radius of the plant. They furnished transportation for these people out . . . oh, they come from Richland Center and Spring Green and of course Portage and The Dells and (Sauk?) and Madison and (Reedsburg?) and all these neighboring towns. But they had a big fleet of buses that went out to these towns and they made each . . . I say, during World War II, most everything was three shifts. So they made each shift and it was quite an operation, just getting the people to work. A lot of them couldn't have got to work if it hadn't been that they run these buses.

How did you get to work?

I drove.

Did people car pool, or was it just mostly those buses?

Yeah. Oh, out of the 30 years that I worked down there, I probably carried passengers for practically all that time.

I even got me a wagon one time. I had ten or 12 people I was carrying in that Ford there that had the three seats in it. A station wagon. *(Laughs)*

What happened to most of the people that lost their jobs at the end of the war? You had something that you could go back to, but were there people that . . . ?

Well, I don't know. As I say, most of them probably had jobs someplace before they come here, and they just gradually disappeared. I don't really know where they all went to.

Do you think that the presence of the plant here made the war feel like a more real event to local people or not?

Probably, because there were so many people working there they felt it was an integral part of it. It probably brought it home to more people than like a strictly agricultural area or something like that. You knew what was going on.

During World War II, after it was over, was it strange to go back to every day life or not, or was it an easy transition during the reconversion to peacetime?

Well, I think for my part, it was kind of a relief to not have all that activity and a little more subtle feeling or something that . . . Of course, economically, it was great for Baraboo.

The war was or afterwards?

No, during the operation of the plant. I mean that brought in a huge payroll for this area, which was good. But I didn't like the idea of everything being so crowded, of having to stand in line at the grocery store or wherever you went. I wasn't really comfortable, I guess, with that many people around, because we were just over crowded.

Were there other problems as a result from the over crowding? Like water, sewer, crime that you remember?

I think most of that come with the construction workers, but we had some riffraff around town. I don't know if I should tell her that experience we had down there on Fourth Street. The house sat pretty close to the street and we was right downtown, right down by the City Hall. And we had a floor lamp. It had these little cluster bulbs, you know, and they were kind of an orange colored bulb. And she had that setting in the front window. Well, I was working shift work at that time.

Helen Allen: Janice was a baby.

Yeah. And I guess the first time I don't think I was home, but a man come to the door and she answered it, and he kind of hmm'd and haw'd and she wasn't about to let him in. I guess we had Nick, the dog, at that time, a Spitz. He was out there on the porch, and kind of ferocious sounding. But anyway, she couldn't figure out what he wanted and he never made it very plain what he wanted, and he finally walked off. But she was kind of nervous and upset about that. Well, then one time I was home, I was sleeping, and she come and called, and she says, "That guy's back here again." And so I, of course, I had to get dressed or partially dressed, and by the time I got out to the door, why he was walking on down the street. And Helen was telling me . . . we lived in a . . . it wasn't actually a duplex, but there was the two families. The landlady lived on one side of the house and we lived on the other. And Helen was telling her one day about this guy that had been there twice. She didn't know what he wanted. And this was an old German lady. And she says, "If I was you, I'd take those red lights out of the window." *(Laughs)*

Helen Allen: *(Laughs)* But the lady across the street had red lights in her window. Red light district.

So we had a few of those kind around, you know, but I can't remember any crime wave we had or anything like that. But there was some rather suspicious characters, you know, transients around that we wasn't used to.

Right after World War II, what kind of a role did you expect the plant to have in life around here? What did you think was going to happen to it?

Originally, after World War II, everybody figured that it would just shut down and they'd dismantle it or something. In fact, the government, when they built it, figured it'd only last about five years. Well, as I say, they let it go pretty much to pot, and then they found out they needed it again for Korea, so they reactivated. Then after that, they kept it up in a fairly decent condition. But everybody figured that they'd probably dismantle it.

After World War II?

Yeah.

How long did it take them to get it up and running again for Korea?

Gosh, I don't know. Probably a year.

It was that bad?

They had a lot of rebuilding to do and the machinery had . . . they didn't really preserve it when they shut it down. They just let it set. Well, then after Korea, they tore everything all apart and put this cosmoline on all the parts to keep it from rusting, you know. The machines were dismantled, but they were left right there in the building so that when they reactivated for Vietnam, it was just a matter of putting them back together, and it wasn't a big deal. But they had a lot of work to do in '50, '51.

What kind of an affect does the plant presently have on this area?

Very little. It's shut down to such a minimum force that's down there now that . . . it used to be when the change of shifts, the traffic come out of there, you know, 12:00 here, that was just solid, well, now you get about four or five cars come out of there at night, and if you miss that, you've missed the heavy traffic. (Laughs). No, there's a little more than that there, but there's very few there.

Was the traffic a real problem?

Oh, yeah. And especially when the construction was going on. It'd take me I'd say sometimes half-hour, 45 minutes to get to work from here. You get out onto 12, and then it was just bumper-to-bumper.

How long would it normally take you to get there from here?

Oh, ten, 15 minutes.

Sometimes it took you 45 minutes?

Yeah. It was kind of stop and go all the way out there, you know.

Is that the only way to really get there? Twelve?

From here. Now, there is 78 that junctions with 12 down there, by [inaudible], and that goes over to Portage, and at one time,--that 78 follows the back side of the plant, but they opened a gate over there during the rush hours, you know, and people coming from Portage or off in that direction, they could come in that back gate, come through the plant.

So did that help a little bit?

Oh, yeah. It shortened their trip quite a little. Otherwise you had to go clear around to Sauk and then come back up 12.

Do many people around here think that the plant should be permanently closed or not?

Oh, there's a lot of them say, "Well, what in the world are they doing down there? Nothing going on now. Why is there anybody working?" Well, I was told one time there's about 2200 buildings in that complex there. And that takes a lot of maintenance just to keep the buildings up, you know. And they've got to keep the roads plowed out in case of fires. They have their own fire department down there, and so they got to keep roads opened in case there was a fire they'd be able to . . . so there is a certain amount of maintenance that they have to do, whether they're operating or not. A lot of people can't understand that, why there's anybody working.

Well, do you think it should be permanently closed or not?

Well, I don't know. If they knew they wasn't going to have anymore use for it, I'd say fine. Dismantle it and sell it for junk or whatever and let the land revert back to the farmers. But they said, like during World War II, well the next war's going to be all nuclear, you know. We aren't going to have any use for powder. But Korea it was a big thing, and again in Vietnam. If we was to get into another war, who knows? I know the government has got a number of other plants, and probably don't need them all, but what it would cost now to build a new one, you know, would go a long ways towards maintaining what they've already got. So it's kind of a toss up. If you knew what was coming, why, you could act accordingly.

Well, that's about all I have. I'll ask you a couple more questions about construction. What did you do on a typical day when you were working construction? Was it organized at all, as far as where people worked and what they did?

It was awful disorganized as far as I was concerned. I remember there for a while--of course this was in the fall of the year; it was cold, there was snow on the ground, and it was really cold. Well, they was pouring a lot of concrete and they didn't want that to freeze. So they built a little tent over it, little temporary cover, and put these charcoal salamanders in there.

What's a charcoal salamander?

Well, it's a little charcoal burner. It's a thing about so big around, so high. They fill it full of charcoal, just like your charcoal grills or something like that. But they'd keep them burning just so that the concrete wouldn't freeze, fresh poured concrete. Well, I was going around and keeping these full, keeping the fires going, you know. And of course every building is designated by a number, just like your house numbers on your street, you know, and a guy come by [and] he had a load of lumber or something there one night, and he says, "Where's such and such a number?" I said, "I don't know. I'm fairly new here." I said, "I don't know where that building is." And he was gone for a couple hours. Pretty soon he come back. He says, "This is what I was looking for. How come you didn't . . ." (Laughs)

Is there anything else that you can think of about the plant that maybe I didn't ask about?

Well, I don't . . .

How old were your children when you were there? Did you have children during World War II?

Yeah. See, I went to work in December of '42. Janice was born in April. So she would have been just a few months old, and then we've got a boy that was born in '44. And that was February of '44, and we bought this house in November of '44, and have been here ever since. That was one thing . . . you asked about building. We had bought a lot over on the other side of town. We was figuring on building a new house over there. This was right shortly after we was married.

And when were you married?

In '38. And we had the lot. Well, we bought an old house out in the country that they wanted just moved out of there; didn't buy the land, just the building. Tore that down and hauled it into town here, and we built a double garage down there. This was actually before the war started, in the very beginning.

Helen Allen: Janice was a baby. I was pregnant with Janice. We bought the lot before . . .

Yeah. Well, anyway, then when the war come along, you couldn't buy a stick of lumber hardly at a lumberyard. Everything was going for such places as the plant down there. So we couldn't do it then, but

we outgrew the place we was living. So we thought well, we'll buy a house, just something we can get by a few years until the war is over and things get back to normal. And so happened to see this for sale, and so we wound up by buying this, still figuring we was going to build over there. And here we are still sitting here. (Laughs)

You never built that house over there?

Never built it. Finally sold the lot over there. And after the kids got a little older, we talked about building or moving or something. Well, that's fine, but wait till we're gone. This is their home, you know. So now I figure what's the use?

Well, is there anything else? Any other stories you remember about working there or about living in this area during World War II that you can think of?

No.

Helen Allen: Your mother and her 13 boarders in [inaudible].

Yeah. We was talking about the shortage of housing. My mother had a four bedroom house over there.

In Baraboo?

Just over here on Eighth Street. I don't know what she had, four or five roomers. This Norton, the concrete company from New York that was out here, she had all their truck drivers, the ready mix truck drivers, five of them come in and boarded and roomed with here. Then she started--there was others around the neighborhood that had rooms but they didn't want to feed the people, so she had these extra boarders. They'd come in for meals. My dad had a stroke in '42, and he couldn't work. He was partially paralyzed, but he could help her some around the house, you know, getting--I don't know what all he did. He had one arm and one leg was paralyzed, but of course she was up to her neck in all the work with that many boarders and plus the roomers.

Did she collect rent, then?

Yeah, they paid for . . .

Helen Allen: I think they paid [inaudible] dollars a week.

Of course, you talk prices. We can look back now and kind of laugh, you know. We thought when they was paying a dollar and a quarter an hour down there, that was big money, which it was at that time.

At the plant?

Yeah. Your construction, your carpenters, most of your trades people, that was about the going rate, was a dollar and a quarter. And now they're 15 to 20 dollars.

If food was rationed, what did she do for extra food?

[Inaudible] her head a lot I think.

How did she feed all those people if she only got certain . . .

Well, of course, you was allowed, you had your meat stamps and all these tokens for this and that, and they all turned their books in to her.

Oh, there was a book of all those stamps even?

Well, sugar you had a coupon book every month. I don't know. She knows more about that than . . .

Helen Allen: *[Inaudible]*. You were allowed so much each month.

Yeah, you'd tear a leaf out of this book when you bought sugar. And meat, how did we get them tokens? Had little red cardboard tokens.

Helen Allen: *[Inaudible]* to use every month.

We'd get them in the mail I suppose. I don't know how we got them. Gasoline, you was issued a coupon book. What was it? Five gallons a month. And we had a gasoline stove that we had to use gasoline in, and we got a lot of stamps for that stove, but most of it went into the car (chuckles) rather than the . . . and then this old lady who lived up there, she had an old Model A that she drove about once a month up town maybe. She had gas stamps left over. So she'd give us hers. Coffee was about the only thing that we ever really run short of. We never could get enough coffee. We roasted barley and I carried cocoa in my lunch, which isn't worth a darn. But that was our biggest hang up, was the . . . cigarettes, of course, they weren't rationed. I smoked cigarettes at the time. We had a friend that operated an A & P store here. So when he got his weekly or monthly allotment in, he'd take out four packages of Old Golds he'd save out for me.

Was there just a shortage of tobacco?

They was shipping them all overseas to the servicemen.

Was there a cafeteria at the plant?

Yeah. Now, there again, I don't know if that operated during the World War II. There was later on. A neighbor of ours lives up here. She worked in that cafeteria.

Did the plant wash your safety clothes? You wore wool.

Yeah. No, we had to do our own laundry on that, but later, when I was on maintenance there, we had to flame . . .

(End of Interview)

DOROTHY BOHNSACK
February 14, 1995
Sauk City, Wisconsin
Deborah L. Crown, Interviewer

Today is Tuesday, February 14, 1995, and this is Deborah Crown, and I'm interviewing Dorothy Bohnsack.

How long have you lived in this area?

All my life.

Where were you living when you heard the plant was going to be built?

Here in this home.

In this very house?

Right.

So had your family lived here for a long time?

My parents moved here in 1919.

And what were you doing then? Were you working or going to school when you heard the plant was going to be built?

No. I was working part time at a bakery in (*Purdesac?*), and through discussion with some people that came in the store, they thought I could apply at Badger. Well, it was sort of new to all of us. We didn't know what to expect or just what, because we had never had a big company around us, because this was all farm land. And so I went up to the plant and got an application blank, and then a few days later, I received notice to come and apply. So I believe (*pause*) . . . I've got my badge, from 1942, and it's the 16th of November, isn't it?

It says the 14th of November.

That's when I started.

And it has a picture of you.

And our fingerprints.

And all kinds of other information.

See, that's we had to present that. That's why I kidded you, "Have you got your ID?" Because you always had to have your identification when you came to the door, or the guy would say go home.

So you couldn't lose that?

Hm-m.

While you were working at this bakery, do you remember about how much you were getting paid at that bakery?

Well, see it was just part-time. See, we were coming out of the Depression years yet. The Depression was 1929 to '41. I would roughly say nine dollars for a half-a-day, which was big money. And then if I got hungry, they'd let me eat bakery goods. And I think my pay when I started at Badger was \$80 a month, in 1942, which was big money.

What was this area like about the time you heard the plant was going to be built? What did it look like?

Well, it was primarily the basic--the Bluffs, we have the Bluffs and the Wisconsin River, but now this was all raw land--I guess that's what I'll call it--in 1941. Well, now you can see change, population change, growth has brought us buildings and criss-cross traffic, and you name it, we've got it. *(Laughs)*. It isn't like it was in the '40s, farm land.

What about where the plant was? What was that?

That was all farms. And they were better farms, and sometimes when you're traveling, you know, you can sort of tell by buildings what type of farmers they are. And it was sad, just for us to lose all those farms, and it was our good, productive soil to grow food. Now, I don't know, some of Badger, I think, is still being used--you'll have to check that out--in summer for growing crops. But I'm not sure on that. At least last report I heard it was. But out here on the curve, by the eating place, there's a two story, big red brick house, and that came from the plant area and had just recently been built before these people got this notice that they had to leave. And they were really upset.

So they moved their house?

Yeah, but they didn't. Someone else did. I didn't see them move it, because it was such a big, big structure. They did move some of the houses that people could easily move, you know, because they didn't have all these big machines like what they have today, what you see on the highway. It was more manual. And then they had to watch out for power lines or cutting, and that, I guess, was sort of costly to do that. But I think we *[inaudible]* just have two houses that were moved in from the plant.

Do you know about how many houses they moved, what do you think?

I don't know. You would have to get that information from Badger. I don't know how many. I think most of them probably were just squashed, because these farmers had to find a different area if they were going to stay in farming, and a lot of them went into Columbia County, which is east of us, toward Milwaukee, because their soil is better, more like what they had here. So I think not too many houses were saved.

Were there a lot of other people that moved to this area to work at the plant?

Well, see there was nothing. There was all raw land, and we had right in my house, we had people from Kentucky, and most of the road workers were from Wisconsin, and other people were from Michigan.

Living in your house?

In the car garage. As long as the weather permitted.

This is when the plant was being built?

Being built. And then we had people from Idaho upstairs and Iowa, Mt. Pleasant. You know where that is?

Yeah.

Burlington. You know where the Burlington--is the Burlington Plant still . . . is that on standby or what?

I'm not exactly sure what that one's doing right now. We're going to be doing a little bit of work with that one later, our company is. But I'm not exactly sure what they're doing right now. I think the plant's called Middletown, Middletown Plant. So how many people did you have living in this house?

Well, these were all at different times.

So you had some living in the garage and some upstairs?

And then when the highway was built, we had a trailer on the side of our house, because they took any piece of land that you could give them. And then, I'll tell you--I don't know just how this went--but I think when Sauk City got the notice, and (Purdessac?), that all these people were coming, the federal government sent someone to each home to see what room they would have available. Because Madison, at that time, was only probably 40, 50 thousand. And Baraboo wasn't that large. So what were they going to do with these people? So I came home. I don't know. I must have been at the bakery or somewhere. And she said, "You're going to have to give up your bedroom."

Who said that to you?

My mother. I said, "My bedroom?" She said, "Yeah. We got orders." See, we've got three rooms upstairs, and luckily when we put plumbing--see, we didn't have sewer and water until in the '30s, and we got that through WPA Funding. Your grandma probably would know that. (*Chuckles*). And then we had outdoor toilets. So that saved us. And if you see this little brick house out here in my yard, most people think that's an outdoor. I said no, that's a smokehouse. That's where they smoked their meat, made their bacon and sausage and got their stuff ready for frying down, and so I got kidded so much about that brick toilet. I said, "It's not an outhouse; it's a smokehouse." But anyway, then I guess [*inaudible*], we had to put an outdoor stairway. That's why this outdoor stairway is here. Then we could come down from my living room from upstairs, then there would be that exit. Most of these people had just come out of this hard depression, and were just happy to have a bed to sleep and place to hang their hat, as they say. So then I think mom put a roll-away there, where my writing desk is, and that was my bed. So the people upstairs, because all of them had children, so they needed two bedrooms at least.

So there were children living here, too?

Oh, yeah. Just small ones. They weren't of school age, yet. Otherwise, these women wouldn't have probably been traveling with their husbands.

So did you have a lot of contact with them living upstairs? Did you eat together?

No. The only contact was with the bathroom. See, there was water upstairs, but we had no bath facilities, no stool or bath. Because there was no way we could get--I don't understand way back. Now, I suppose you could do it. So they all had the old chambers and then they would bring this . . . and when it was warm temperature, well they'd go out to the outdoor.

But you didn't all eat together?

No. But they had a cook stove upstairs. They did their cooking and then we had a ice box. We didn't have a refrigerator. So at that time, they still brought the--the ice man come and bring your big cakes of ice. So then the only one that shared our refrigerator was Phoebe, from Michigan, from the car garage, you know where I showed you where my car is, because that was set up so fast, Mom put an oil stove. Do you ever recall seeing these three burner oil . . . ? Then she didn't have a place for refrigeration. So then she shared our refrigerator.

Now, this was while the plant was being built or while it was in production?

While it was being built.

Did a lot of people around here have other people staying with them from elsewhere, from somewhere else?

Oh, yeah. The whole town, if you had any rooms. Now, I wrote a name down and I called her, and she worked on--I forgot she worked in production--but she just retired a number of years ago from being a lady guard at Badger. See, in my time, there wasn't ladies. It was all men guards. But then when women's lib came to be, then the women got a hold of everything. I don't know that that was (*laughing*) was for the better. I don't know. Anyway, she lived down the road from me, and that's where she met her husband. He was from the East and he came with the army. They brought army people in to help build the plant, and that's where she met her husband. And then I think, I don't know, I think she moved east with him, and then they came back here. But now he passed away. But she'd have a lot of history, too.

So she met him because he was living . . . ?

At her house. Yeah, I think that's the way the story went. And she just lived--there's a [*inaudible*] Chevrolet Garage. Their house stood in that area.

So just a couple blocks away?

Yeah.

What were those other people like?

That came? Well, we were fortunate. They were all, as far as I know, my parents didn't have any problems with them with paying or . . .

So they paid rent to live here, then?

Yeah, yeah.

But you never had any problems with them. Did you hear of any problems?

Not to my knowledge. Only thing, Mom had problems with those road workers when they were building the highway out here. We were going into sugar rationing, and she asked them to bring their coupons. We all got books, you know, of so many coupons. And so she says, "Well, I guess I'll have to try making things with something else." So she used a lot of molasses.

Instead of sugar? How was that?

Well, it was pretty good. You know, you could add it to different things. Then we went into meat rationing. But I think they were only here two, three weeks.

So she bought groceries for them?

Yeah, she made the meals for them.

The people that were building the highway?

Yeah.

Do you remember the reaction of most people in the area, when they heard that the government, or Hercules, was buying the land for the plant? What did people think of that?

Well, I don't know how Baraboo felt, because, back in that time, I hardly knew where Baraboo was. Because you didn't have cars. You had to wait until someone asked you, or your folks say, were going to go to Baraboo, and we were more to Madison than to Baraboo. See, Sauk was only 1,000 population or a little over, and I think it was such a shock, and I think people were afraid what we were going to be getting into with all this influx of people. What are they going to be like or what are they going to demand? So I think after they got used to it, it sort of blew over.

What did people think of what was going to be built there? What did they think of it being an ammunition plant there? How did they feel about that?

There again, let's see, I knew where the farms and that were, so just from my thoughts, I think the farms were very disturbed to think, "Why couldn't they have taken some waste land somewhere?" Well, Sauk County was one of the lead counties in production in the state of Wisconsin, at that time, but now we're nothing.

But that was good farm land?

Hmm. When you're driving, did you happen to notice that [inaudible] farm? There'd be a sign and it's got a big silo things, and there land was a lot like the Badger land--flat and really productive.

Do you know if land prices in the area rose or fell as a result of the government buying that?

There again, I wasn't involved with land buying and I never really went to an auction. I think probably--I don't know if they'd have that at Ordnance, what the price of land went. I would think so.

From what you heard that other people were saying, do you think those people that lived there were paid enough for their land so they could go buy more land somewhere else? Or do you think that they didn't get enough money to do that? Now, you said some of them went to another county?

Yeah, because there was no farms equivalent in Sauk County to what they had. So they went elsewhere for soil, for production, and fortunately, a lot of them got down toward the Milwaukee area, because Milwaukee County is a lead county. But I don't know. It's just like selling today. I don't think that they probably got the price that they should have. Don't quote me on that. I don't know enough about that period. I knew that the farms had to be taken down and everybody was upset, but really, I don't think it affected our local people that much, because most of the people were going to service, the younger generation. And a lot of the people that didn't stay in farming, they went to Madison to work at Oscar Mayer or Ray-o-vac or

something like that. I think probably the biggest was the shock of all the people coming up; what are we going to do?

Did you ever go and see the plant when it was being built, during construction?

No. I don't think so. Because that would have been '42 [*inaudible*] was there, and then we weren't allowed out in the area. Because, see, the only buildings I worked in was those two by the highway, the administration buildings, and as far as I got was up in the what they call Rocket Area. We had to go into payroll stations and pay off people, and that's about as far as I got in the area. And then until . . . (*pause*) . . . well, they had that tour, when those [*inaudible*], and then I think I might have been once around on a tour. But then you're always in a government vehicle. I don't know. It was just a lot of buildings and (*laughs*) I didn't understand what they were doing really. I've got a maintenance man. I put his name down. He can tell you about manufacture, making of the powder.

Would you say that most of the construction workers lived right at the site, or did most of them live in other places, like here?

Well, there was a trailer park up in (Purdesac?), but I'm only half-a-mile away from them, but I don't know their history (*chuckles*). There was a trailer park up there. I don't know if those people brought their own trailers in or if they were government trailers and the government had purchased this land to park them. This I'm not sure of. But then when the plant was in operation, see, we were in gas rationing. So they had government buses, and the powder workers would ride--you probably know where Mineral Point is or (Plakville?), down in that area--they would ride government bus from there and come through Mt. (Horb?) and some other little towns, and then they would pick me up out in front of my house. Because there wasn't that many car pools at that time. And so it was easier for people to pay the government for a ride. And I think . . .

Oh, you had to pay to ride the bus?

Yeah. Well, I think they were doing that, it wasn't just from that area, I think toward Columbus or [*inaudible*], too, they had buses. And out of Madison, I know. Oh, and then they heated our plant with coal. So all the coal, a part of it, came across our old Sauk City railroad bridge. And it'd be just clunk, clunk, clunk, one car after the other, and those people that lived down near the tracks (*chuckles*), they thought isn't that ever going to end? And so the Old Milwaukee Road got its workout during Badger. But now it's sleeping.

Where did all these people come from, all these new people that came to the area to work there?

Well, like I said, Iowa and Michigan and Kentucky and Idaho, all around Wisconsin.

You said earlier that everybody was a little bit nervous about all these new people coming into the area, so did people get along really well or not?

Well, we didn't have, at the time Badger came, we didn't have street numbers, we didn't have house numbers, we didn't have much of a lighting system, we had a walking policeman, we didn't have these that ride around in the cars all the time, and then they might have, before the plant was getting--toward the end in the '40s, they might have bought a squad car. I don't remember. But let's see. Our community was predominantly German people, and Germans, as a rule, mix pretty easily. And so I think the biggest, probably was sort of a hardship on the little grocery stores, because at that time, we didn't have supermarkets. We just had little independent grocery stores. So I suppose that changed their way of doing things, too, because there were more people buying and they had to have more on order.

But were people friendly to each other? People that lived here for a long time and the new people that came in, were they friendly to each other?

Really, I think more so then than they are now. Of course, I'm a different generation now. But I would probably have been your age, and there wasn't that many young people that came in. It was mainly these workers, because World War II had the men to the service, so there wasn't too many problems with workers and young people that I recall. It's probably like any time, but nothing out of the ordinary. One thing we did, we got a nice big dance hall. It was a hotel and this man came from Germany and he decided to put a dance hall on this hotel, and it got to be known all over Southern Wisconsin, and you really had good bands. So that was a asset to Sauk City, for the young people at that time.

Do you remember any Hispanic people here or African-American people here during that time?

I don't think we had the race problem like we are having today. Let's see, when I was growing up, there was a section in Madison, and that had Colored folks, and that's all we ever knew about Colored folks. But now it's a different story. Unless Baraboo did, I don't know.

But you don't remember other people of different races living around here, then?

Well, the only thing we would have--Indians. Of course, we're used to Indians because of our area. So that was nothing new. But we don't have any Indians. You've got to go up to the Dells. That's where they're all.

Do you remember many of them working at the plant?

We didn't have any in the office, but now I don't know. You'd have to talk to someone that's worked in production. I don't know what they hired. I know there was some Indian men, but if they had Indian women, I don't know.

Do you think that all the people moving into this area took work away from local people, or did everybody seem to have something to do?

I think probably what might have changed the little--see, we didn't have much. We had a creamery and a canning company and probably a oil company and feed mills. Well, they probably at the time had to increase their wage scale to these people to compete with Badger.

Did the plant pay higher wages than other places?

Well, I don't know. At that time, I would think they did because they had to get people, and that was one way of doing it.

Before you started working at the plant, what did you think it was going to be like to work there?

I had no idea. I had worked in various places, but I didn't know really what I was going to be doing or what, and I didn't have that much education, just what I got in high school and that was it. Well, this is what we had when I started. We had manual typewriters, manual adding machines, and there might have been what they called a (contometer?). And there was no IBM and what you people have now. I can't read my tapes when I come home. I get so disgusted, those store tapes from the grocery store. Gosh, what is that? Anyway, in the '40s, we had no electric. Everything was manual. You did it manual typewriter. And then maybe by the end of the operation of the '40s, they might have got an electric typewriter from somebody.

What did you think they did at the plant, before you started working?

I had no idea. All I knew, it was something with powder.

Why did you want to go and work there?

Well, it was a job. And I thought all I can do is try it. Because I had only been doing mainly part-time work, and I wasn't getting no savings saved up at all. So I thought, "Well, if I don't go, somebody else is going to be going." So that's how I got going.

So was this a full-time job at the plant?

Yeah.

So you wanted to work full-time then, and you also wanted a better wage so you could put some money away for savings, then? Okay.

Because here, if there was any job, people held on to them forever and ever, and there wasn't that many office jobs in Madison at that time, either, because we were coming out of this slow period.

Which building or area at Badger did you work?

Administration building.

And what exactly did you do at the plant?

I worked in accounts payable in the accounting department, until, let's see, it went in '42, and I stayed until '46. And then the plant was going on . . .

Can you tell me what an average day would be like working at the plant? Like you'd get there and . . . ?

Well, most of us carried our lunches, and then they did put up a plant cafeteria, but we only had a half-an-hour. So by the time you go to the bathroom and eat, your half-an-hour is gone.

What time did you start?

I imagine 8:00. We might have, at some time or other, started . . . I would say roughly 8:00.

And how long did you work?

I know at the end, it was 4:00, but it seemed like when we were working in the '40s, we had different hours. Seemed like we might have worked till 4:30, because we had so much business, you know, and I would say roughly between 4:00 and 4:30.

(end of side 1; beginning of side 2)

This is Tuesday, February 14, 1995. This is Side 2, interview between Deborah Crown and Dorothy Bohnsack.

Here's a picture in the 1940s, and this is me.

Did all these people work in administration, then?

Yeah, in the administration building where you go in.

So there's about 40 people, 30 or 40?

Yeah, but that's just one section.

What section is this, accounting?

No, I see the plant manager. This was our plant manager. We must've had the accounting and plant manager and some of the higher ups or something on there.

And on the back you have everybody. Did everybody sign it?

I don't know if I got everybody or not. 1945.

September 12, 1945.

So another thing, we didn't have the problem that they do today at work with absentees because of babies. Most of the people were gone. Some of the younger girls if they wanted to move some place else they left. But there were quite a number of people that were more matured, and they were there for the paycheck. But now, when I see what this young--I shouldn't say--but you know what young women are experiencing today, and it just hurts me. This baby they take to somebody else and then they rush off to work and I don't know. I don't think that's what the one above wanted. I thought to myself, I got so many relatives that do that. It's hard on the individual and it's hard on the family, and I think that's where we get a lot of our difficulties from in this country.

So did a lot of those ladies have children?

If they did, they were grown and, you know, maybe on their own already or something. I don't know. We didn't really have too much time to talk about, because that half-an-hour, you know.

A lot of them looked very young. Do you know if a lot of them were married?

No, I know these two, three, four here wasn't, but she left and she went to California. And I don't know. I think if they did have children, these people, they probably stayed at home with them until they were of school age. I guess that's what I want to say.

Now, what were some other things you did on an average day? You did payroll?

No, accounts payable, paying all the bills that came into the plant, all the money. And Baraboo is the post office for Badger. Everything we mail is Baraboo, Wisconsin. You probably know that. But we never could figure that out, because we thought we were closer to the plant than Baraboo. Well, see The Bluffs divides us. The Baraboo Bridge. We're down on the flats. We always kidded about that: "Baraboo gets all the postal money." All the [inaudible], and they still do.

So you paid all the plant bills? Did that take all day to do?

Oh, yeah. They had warehouse, they'd tally in what they'd received, and you'd have to check that against the bill, which you got from the company, to see if it was all right. And then if there was something broken or whatever, then you'd have to call another department and say what do we do? Hold up on the payment

or just what, because some of those places you just had a few days to get a bill paid, or else you'd be paying a penalty. So that was mainly what I did. Oh, I know. I don't know if this was in the '40s. We sent the Badger Center group of men down to one of the eastern plants for training to make powder. And boy, we had to get their money to them, because they needed it for living. So there was no time wasted on that.

Was your job union or non-union?

Non-union.

What were the working conditions like there?

At the end, it wasn't, you know, real like a modern office, because it's all older construction. As a whole, we had pretty good supervisors, so that means a lot if you've got somebody that you can work with.

Did you all get along?

Pretty much as far as I know.

Was this your first time to do this kind of work, or had you done this kind of work before?

No. I had never worked in accounting. It was just through my little jobs I had between '41 and '42, when I went to Badger, that I had some experience in things. One thing, I had worked at a library, just part . . . it was a national youth program, and the librarian I suppose applied for funding to have someone help her. So I did that for a little while downtown in a library, and I enjoyed that. Because you get to see all the books and new books and index them and put the labels in. So I guess I'd say I'm sort of a Jack-of-all trades or something, master of none. *(Laughs)*

Was this the first time you worked for a really big company?

Yeah.

And what did you think about working for a really big company?

Well, you know it's a large company, but you work in your department and you don't get to meet a lot of them, because they're in a different--let's see, there were some of these people were out in area offices. Did they give you a list of people?

M-hm.

Somebody that worked in the area. See, I'm not familiar with that at all.

But did it seem like you were in a really big company, or did it seem like a small company to you? What did it feel like?

Well, it was a larger amount of people to work with than what I was used to. That was just probably the most in the beginning.

Because you'd only worked for smaller places before?

Yeah.

Was the work that you did stressful, or not? Was there a lot of pressure to work quickly, or not?

Well, I suppose at times there was times when we were getting pushed, you know. But I would say it was probably pretty even.

What do you think about your part in the defense effort?

Well, if they were taking our section and if I wouldn't have gone to work there, someone else would have been sitting there. And I had been a resident of Sauk County all my life and paying taxes, yet, so if I would have left the area, you know, when I was 20 or 21, well, it would have just been another working (*chuckles*) place, you know.

What do you think of the plant's part in the defense effort? How important do you think this plant was in World War II?

Well, I guess I never really knew what powder making was. I knew there was one plant at the top of the state, because I had a relative that worked there, but that powder was made for other reasons, not warfare.

Do you know if the plant provided day care facilities for the mothers that worked there?

No, (*laughs*), that wasn't into being yet. Are we being recorded? Shut it off.

Do you know what those women did with their children, the ones that had children?

Well, I don't know. I think the custom at that time was you stayed at home with your children till they went to first grade or whatever they call it now, kindergarten or--I never went to kindergarten. (*Laughs*). You probably went to kindergarten. Did you go to day care, too?

No. No, I didn't.

We never had kindergarten in Sauk, till--oh, this school system we've got. It's killing us people. I don't know what we're going to do with education. I think it's going to be sort of a battle. It's a shame, but I don't feel that there's too much--our local paper, all it is is sports, sports. Is that what I'm paying my tax money for? I don't know. I think education's going to have to change their . . .

Do you know if there was a plant or a company newspaper?

(*Laughs*)

Okay. And what was that called? Was it called Badger World?

Yeah. Then there was another one. That was what (*pause*).

That one's from '72.

I've never seen what (*pause, she is looking for something I assume*) the historical one says. They call it now (*Olin?*) *Badger World*.

And that one's from 1992. But it was called Badger World before?

Right.

What kind of articles did it have in it during World War II? What did people write about?

In 1942? You know, I had a lot of old Badger papers, and I thought well, I'm not going to keep those. But what I remember is articles on different department heads, and something new that had been created by another plant or something, something like that, and then maybe some little newsy items, like this one had [inaudible] (chuckles) or wherever, you know.

Were there jobs that only women did or only men did at the plant?

In the accounting was mainly women, because men don't like to--unless they were the department head. But I think that question is more for the area, because I don't know where they . . .

Well, you did say something about the guards.

Yeah. This Ruth, ask her. I don't think we always had lady guards. I think it was always men. Ask her when women guards became into being. Because did it come during the women's lib period, because I just remember men looking if I had my badge on.

Do you remember any morale boosting efforts, like promotions that they used to have there?

Oh, bonds. U.S. Savings Bonds. We were preached that all the time, and there was one woman, she wouldn't participate.

Did you buy bonds?

I couldn't buy big denominations, but I held them until my mother passed away, and then what did I do? I had to give the money to the state for inheritance. But it was lucky I had that money put away; otherwise, I'd have been in problems.

What about this woman that didn't want to buy . . . ?

I think they wanted to buy a house or something. I think that's what she was . . . see, what was happening, it was holding the department up from 100 percent participation. In bonds, (laughs) that's one . . . now, this isn't recorded is it?

Yeah.

Oh, geez.

You want me to turn it off?

Probably you better.

I don't think anybody would say anything about it.

Yeah, but she isn't around here anymore anyway. Well, it was true, and so I don't know. I think they just got disgusted and just thought, well, I guess we don't get the 100 percent.

Were there any other promotions that you remember?

Oh, they always had more things out in the production--Walt can tell you that, and Ruth--with safety. I don't know if they had so many man-hours or something without an accident, then they'd get awards or something.

Do you remember if the plant got any Army/Navy E Awards?

I wouldn't know.

When did your job end, after World War II, or around that time? Because I know you came back, later.

I went back. That's 1946, isn't it. Nineteen, fifty-one I went back.

When did you stop working there the first time? Forty-six?

Forty-six.

How did your job end? Were you laid off or did you quit or did they . . . ?

No. Forty-six (pause). In '46, this lady was my accounting supervisor (*tapping on table or picture*), and she had been a commercial teacher, so I gained a lot of points from her. Well, she kept me. Let's see, at the end of the plant, in '46, we had to move all these key personnel people somewhere back to another ordinance plant, maybe to Iowa or wherever, and then we got what was known as expense reports for their living if housing wasn't ready for them, and went like your grandpa, then moving bills, and she kept me until we got those people to their destinations. And so that was my ending of Badger in 1946, getting these people back to wherever they came from or wherever they were going.

Were these government people that were being moved?

No, no. They would have been Hercules people. See, government is one branch and the powder company is a separate branch. See, the powder company just operates for the government.

Do you know, was the plant put on standby after World War II until Korea, or was it still active?

(Pause)

(Reading) Nineteen, forty-five, January 30th, operations in the Rocket Area began. September, production ceased, and the plant was place in standby status until 1951.

So it was in September of 1945, then?

Right. And then, March 5th, of 1951, see that's when it re-opened.

For Korea?

(Reading) Liberty Powder Defense Corporation set up offices at Badger.

Did many people save their money, or spent a lot of their money during World War II? What were you doing?

I was saving my money for my bonds. (*Laughs*) I don't know. Well, what would we have done? Eighty dollars I started. What did I end up? You know, I've got that all marked somewhere, but where? You know, my beginning salary and ending. I don't think I was making \$200 a month yet. Because I know I started at \$225 in October of '51. So from '46 to '51, wages probably--I probably wasn't up to 200, because starting at \$80.

A month?

Yeah. In '42.

But do you know if people around here, people that you knew, were they spending a lot of money during the war, or were they mostly saving their money?

See, in this period, when plant closed in the '40s, a lot of people what might have been here, left. And so I don't know. A lot of people never felt secure to go back there to work. They needed a permanent job, because it was one of these on and off situations. So our basic local people I don't think banked that much on the plant. They were more people going into, if they were working the industry, in Madison. See, we've got the University and hospitals and that sort. Walt can tell you more, because he was around the villages. I don't know who stayed. Living out here, I really didn't get to know that many people.

Do you know, what did you do for entertainment, during World War II?

We had some rural dance halls, out in the country. Most of them are closed down now. If somebody had a wedding dance or anniversary dance, well, that would be the recreation. And then until this Riverview Ballroom came . . .

Was that the one that man built?

Yeah. You'll have to see that. It's right on Water Street, but you got to go down and drive around to see the view of the river. So Saturday nights that was our recreation. We didn't have to go to walking class or jogging class. My dad says you might as well take your bed down there. I said, "Well, you know where I am." You know, he wasn't much to say too many comments. Well, I had to do something and that was good exercise, dancing, and he just had to put that five cents in. Then, see, I didn't have a car. We were just coming out of the one car program. Well, he says, "Remember, when I was going out," he said, "the horse new the way home, but this car isn't going to know the way home." (*Laughing*) So I wasn't much of a beer drinker, but most of the girls, we'd just have a small beer, you know, and I thought, "Gee, I better watch it, or I won't get a car."

Did people gamble during the war that you know of?

I think gambling's been around as long as the earth. I'm sad how it's taking over our country now, I think. I think, you know, some people would gamble over a game of cards. That'd be gambling I think, but now they go up--I've never been there, but you've probably got them in Iowa, too. I don't know.

Not too many, that I know of.

I really shouldn't answer on that, because I don't know. You know, I think if it was done, it was done mainly in the bars.

Did the plant or the local communities plan recreational activities? Did they have things planned that everybody could go do for fun?

I don't know. You'll have to ask Walt more about that. It seems like there was a recreation hall--or Ruth would probably know--in the plant. Now, I don't know what that was for. It seems like there was a building up on the road to Gate Town. But what they did, I really don't know.

By how much did the general population increase? Do you know what the population was before the plant was here and then after?

Well, it seems like our population probably was about 16, 17 hundred, but I don't think we grew that much, because a lot of these people were just here to build the plant. We got that influx of people for housing. So I don't know. Right now, I think we're about 3,000.

Was there any temporary housing set up for people that came to work at the plant that you know of?

Well, you'll have to ask them. Across from Badger, you'll have to get information from people there. But across was the barracks that they built. And then people lived in there, and there may have been a trailer court. And then I think they set up a school for these children, but you have to get that from . . . I didn't follow that that close. But then what they did after the wars, the University rented people that were ex-veterans and they were going to the University of Madison. Are you familiar with Madison at all?

A little bit, yeah.

Well, they would live out here and commute in a government bus. But then after that was over, then I don't know. I think it all sort of got run down, and so I don't know. It's just become private trailers. Now, that's all government land there, too, across from the plant. But someone should be able to give you some help on that. And then I remember there was a long barrack that never had been used. Now, they've made those into apartments for people.

Do you think that this area changed during this time, as far as people's morals, during World War II? Compare it to before World War II and then during the war. Do you think people's morals changed or their values changed?

Most our people of 50 years ago are many gone, and now we've got a different generation of people. Now, we have the cars, the snow mobiles, the joggers, whatever, and it's at a different pace. So I really don't even know who lives downtown anymore. The houses, what I knew, probably been sold and somebody else has taken it over. So I feel like ancient. (Chuckles). I really do. [Inaudible]. So I think that in my thoughts, it's too bad that they took the railroads out of the country. We wouldn't have had to build all these roads. It'd have been safer. Because now you've got these semis. (Laughs). See, these roads, now, we just were remodeling on this road a few years ago, and now I had to put curb and gutter in. For what? I don't know. But I think it eventually will be leaving us, because we just get too much traffic. I think as long as you have people one-to-a-car commuting, because one works here, one works there, how are you going to connect?

Do you remember if anybody disliked the plant because it made powder during World War II?

Well, I think most people felt we had to protect our country and ourselves, and if it had to be, we had to accept it.

What about during Korea or Vietnam? Was it about the same feeling, or was it different?

It'd probably be about the same answer, because we've got to have protection. And I don't know anymore how many plants are still operating and now they've changed probably the methods of preparation of that, too. See, a problem now apparently is our water up at Badger. And see people living around there, I suppose, feel there's pollution or whatever. I don't know.

Did World War II and the plant being there have an affect on food being available? Was it harder to get certain kinds of food because there were so many people?

Well, that's like I said. We didn't have big supermarkets, so you'd have to talk to somebody that was a grocer. Paul Meyer probably could help you on that, because his grandpa was in the grocery business. But I imagine they had to keep watching their shelves pretty close. But see, back in that period, people made most of their things by hand. It wasn't going to the store every day and getting something, you know.

Were there a lot of women that worked at the plant that you know of?

From my area, you mean? I'm just thinking the office. See, I'm not familiar who worked out in the area part of it at all. Because people moved in. Well, there wasn't probably four or five women from Sauk that I know of. I don't know what there was from [inaudible].

Do you think that most of these women had worked outside of the home before coming to the plant or not? Do you think most of them had jobs before they worked there, or would you think this was mostly their first job?

The group that I'm thinking of would have been more just coming out of high school or early twenties. Probably would have been their first jobs.

Did many of them want to keep on working, after the plant was placed on standby after World War II, or do you think a lot of them preferred to work only in their home again?

No. This one, she followed her husband in service, so she got to Europe and all (chuckles) over, and one I'm thinking of, she got a job at an implement business in Sauk, and she was there for a long time. I don't know. Two girls I grew up, down on Water Street, they ended up out on the East Coast. Of course, it's like I say . . .

(End of Interview)

LAVERNA HACKETT
February 15, 1995
Baraboo, Wisconsin
Deborah, L. Crown, Interviewer

Today is Wednesday, February 15, 1995. This is Deborah Crown. I'm interviewing Laverne Hackett. How long have you lived in this area?

Since 1932. I moved to Baraboo from South Dakota in 1932.

And how old were you at that time, when you moved here?

Oh, dear. Let's see. I was born in 1918. So that would be . . . I was just starting high school. I think I was a freshman.

And where you living when you heard the plant was going to be built?

In Baraboo.

Did you work or go to school then

Well, at that time, I was just newly married. I'd been married just a short time, and I was married in 1938.

Were you working or staying home?

No, I was at home.

Can you describe the area at that time?

Oh, Baraboo was just a fun place to live. I mean it was just ideal. You meet a lot of friends, and once you made these friends, they were life-long.

What was the reaction of most people in the area when they learned the government would be taking [inaudible]?

Well, there were mixed reactions. The people that lived on the prairie, as we called it, were very definitely upset. And I can understand their point of view, because it was prime farm land. These people had lived there for generations, and they were losing their homes. And, of course, any time that is a problem. The people that lived around here, Baraboo has always been an area where there has been minimal plants to work in; so therefore the wages were never great. There were never a lot of factories, so to the working class of people, it was quite an asset.

Did anyone in your family own land out there that was going to be purchased?

No. My family did not own any land out there.

Do you think that most people that did live out there were paid enough for their land so that they could buy comparable land somewhere else?

No. I'm afraid that they did not feel that way. They felt that they had been--the land had been purchased for far less than what it was worth because it was prime farm land.

Did you ever see the construction site?

Oh, yes. Yes. In fact, we used to drag--there was a spot up on the hill there where you could overlook the plant. At that time, there was a road through there. Yes, we used to--and I had family members working at the construction site. So I was quite familiar with what was going on most of the time.

What were the conditions like at the construction site? What did it look like?

(Laughs) Oh, dear. Well, it was around the clock deal. So there was always activity. There were people coming and going and trucks coming and going, and things going into the air, you know, electrical poles going up. It was a fascinating time. It was interesting to see everything and how fast things got done and how fast the American people can do things if they have to.

Did most of the construction workers live in town or right at the construction site?

Oh, most of them lived in the surrounding area. North Freedom, Baraboo, I mean there are small communities all around, and most of them lived in the surrounding area.

So were most of them from here or did a lot of them come from somewhere else?

Oh, I think they came from various areas. I mean not only locally, but I think they came from areas like (Reedsberg?) and Portage, and people who had different skills, carpenters, electricians, I think they came from various places.

Where did they live?

Most of them rented. A lot of them rented. M-hm. Well, this is going to be later, because this is during the plant operation [inaudible]. They had Badger Village and the barracks out there. But during the construction, they rented. And I know my mother, at that time, was a widow lady. She had a home down here on First Avenue, and she boarded 15 men. She cooked for them every day, and there were five of the men stayed at her home, but then the other gentlemen all had rooms around, in the neighboring houses.

But she cooked for those [inaudible]?

She cooked for them. She packed their lunches and she cooked for them.

Was that common?

Yes, quite, quite common, ah-huh.

And so did they pay her to do that?

Oh, yes. M-hm. Yeah, she was compensated.

How did the local people and the non-local people get along?

Oh, I think very well. I think they accepted each other.

Do you remember any people of different races that worked on construction?

No, I don't, not on construction so much as later.

During the construction of the plant, what did the workers do on evenings or weekends? Did they have any activities that they . . . ?

Oh, yes. Yes. There were bowling alleys, there were theaters. Of course, we have an unusually beautiful theater here. Of course, the bars were always busy. I mean if you work hard, normally the saying goes, you play hard. So. (Laughs). And the men would relax. I mean they had nothing else to do. Most of them were away from their families. And they played a lot of cards. People in this area play a lot of cards. So that was always a nice recreation.

Do you think that the construction workers from other places took work away from local people or not?

No, I don't think at that particular time that would be true.

How did you find out about the job or get your job at the plant?

My husband was working for a company here in town and the wages were not so good. We'd just had our second son, and we were living in Baraboo, and we had to have a job with more money and he heard about the plant; so he applied to the plant. After he applied at the plant and he was accepted, we had to make a decision where we were going to live. Those days, 1938, '39 and '40, we had no car. So he had the option of either riding the bus or moving the entire family to Badger Village. So we moved to Badger Village.

And how did you get your job there?

I applied through the--I went to the plant and applied. At that time, they had a very fine nursery at the local Badger Village. It was very well staffed. They had teachers and they had nurses there. I mean you're children would have been very well taken care of. So I decided that--I'm quite patriotic--and I decided I had to help.

And what exactly was it that you did, during World War II, at the plant?

After my application was accepted, I got a job at the chemical lab as a driver. They called it the sample rock. Every so often, we had to take the car and go through the various areas in the plant and pick up samples of powder and solutions and things and take it back to the lab, log it in, and then the chemists and the technicians would analyze it. And that was my job, my first job. I was a sample runner.

Before you started working there, what did you think working at the plant would be like?

I had no idea. I really didn't. All I know is from the comments and the people that I knew that worked there, they enjoyed it, they were very adequately paid, which makes a difference, and I thought it would be patriotic and also fun, because at that time, I felt that I had to do something for the war effort.

What year did you start working there?

Nineteen, forty-three.

Why was it that you wanted to go to work there? Was there more than one reason that you . . . ?

Well, perhaps several reasons. My husband was employed there, I felt, as I said, a patriotic effort, I knew that my children would be adequately cared for because of the nursery, and I was sitting home on hours on end, not feeling like I was contributing anything. And, of course, my husband and I, being, you know, just

newly married, we wanted to establish some kind of a savings account to start building up for something for the future.

In which building or area at Badger did you work?

I worked in the chemical laboratory, Building Number 2556.

And can you describe an average day?

Oh, (laughs), an average day is we clocked in at 15 minutes before the hour. We had to be on the job at precisely the right time. Like at 7:00 we had to be on the job at 8:00 to replace the people that were working on the night shifts. So there was never any gap in any position or any part of the lab that was not being fully staffed at that time. So we clocked at 57 minutes of 4:00.

Did you bring your own lunch?

Yes. We carried our own lunch and we had to put on our outfits. Everybody had to wear outfits, like either lab -- we had to wear lab coats. A lot of the people worked in the area wore coveralls. We carried our own lunch, and then at lunchtime, we had a half-an-hour to eat. That meant you had to leave the lab, go to what they called the change house, which is about a block away, and that would be where they had toilet facilities, they had lockers and tables where you could sit and eat, go over there, eat and get back, and be back on your position in the half-an-hour.

Was that hard to make sometimes?

No. You accepted it. You knew that was the policy; so you accepted it. You just had to hurry a little bit, that's all.

So how many shifts were there?

Three shifts.

And do you remember when those were?

Yes. What we called the day shift went from 8:00 until 3:00 and the swing shift from 4:00 until midnight, and we called it the graveyard shift, from midnight until 8:00.

How did your job fit into the overall production of the final product?

Well, I think our job was one of the most important jobs out there, because we had to analyze the powder and make sure that it was fired properly, that all the chemical ingredients were exactly as the government specified. The government sets up the regulations for the quality of powder. There were several different types being made there. There was 30 caliber, 50 caliber, 155 [inaudible], 105, 90 millimeter, different areas of ammunition, and each type of ammunition had to be broken down and analyzed from the very nucleus of the powder. So it was a very technical job. It was exacting, precise.

Was your job union or non-union?

Was non-union.

And what were the working conditions like?

Well, we found that they were quite satisfactory. I mean the personnel was always very cooperative. The working conditions were fine. I mean they tried to make you comfortable.

Was this your first time to do this kind of work?

Yes, it was.

And what did you think about that?

Oh, I loved it. I absolutely loved it.

So this was also the first time you'd ever worked for a big company, too?

Yes. First time I had ever worked outside of the home in my life.

What was it like to work for a big company?

They were very fair. I mean we worked--I think Hercules powder was the initial contractor there. They were very fair, they paid an excellent wage, they had a wonderful hospital, in case of an injury or an illness. They would always take you right over there and do everything--I thought it was very, very good. Excellent.

Was your job stressful or not, or was there a lot of pressure to work quickly or not?

Yes, quite frequently. I mean there was a certain particular area where samples would come into the laboratory. And they had to be analyzed within a very limited time limit, because the plant was holding up that particular type of action until they got the results from the lab. So, in other words, the area in the plant that had this solution, for instance, we called it the mix house, they could not pump this mix that went out to the next phase until they got the results from the lab. Because if the mix wasn't just right, then they had to change it right there. That had to be where the change was made. So it was very precise, and yes, it was quite demanding.

What do you think of the plant's part in the defense effort? How important was . . . ?

Oh, I think it was utterly important. I really do.

What kind of people worked at the plant, like the percentage of women versus men?

Mostly--there were a great many women. This is what I think started the whole process of women going to work. I think everybody felt like I did. I mean a lot of the women had husbands who were in service, brothers in service, and they all felt it was a necessary thing. So everybody worked, and I think they all felt very proud.

What about people of other races?

At one time, during the plant operation, they brought in a group of Jamaicans, and they were housed at the CCC Camp near Devil's lake, and they did work throughout the plant in various areas, and very good workers, apparently, and I never heard any problems with them. The guys used to tease the girl, but of course, that's normal, too. That's just part of the working association. Because there were very few men in the plant, and most of the men that were at the plant were people who could not get into service.

Did the plant provide day care facilities?

No, they did not.

What did most women do with their children?

Well, most of them had baby sitters at home, and like in my case, I was very fortunate because Badger Village had been established and there were many, many families living there with children, and they had an excellent nursery. So my children would go there. Whenever my shift would happen to be, I would take my children to the nursery, with a change of clothes, and they would stay there for the eight-hour shift, and when I got home, I'd pick them up. They had nurses there, teachers there.

So was it a school also?

Yes, yes it was a school also.

Can you tell me anything more about that nursery? I haven't been able to find anybody else who has had any experience . . . ?

Oh, it was a real fun place for the kids. They had built little shelves with little cubicles in, you know, and they'd take their things and put their things in, they'd draw pictures, and then they'd send all -- then when you'd pick up your children at night, you'd pick up all the little things that they had made during the day and take them home with you. They liked it. And they had excellent supervision, excellent meals. They were also furnished food. And the children had good, nourishing meals, and if anyone ever got ill, they had a nurse that would immediately take them out of the room and into her office, where she would take care of them until the parents got home.

Did you have to pay for that?

Yes.

About how much was that?

I don't remember, but I know it was not expensive.

About how many children went there?

Well, of course, it would all go according to shifts. I think when Keith and Bob were there, Bob was my youngest son, Keith my oldest, I think there were about 30 or 35 children in the class at the same time. They all had little mats on the floor like little rugs, you know, little padded mats. That would be their nap time, and little beds for their night sleeping. Little cots.

So the nursery was 24-hours a day?

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Because we didn't have any particular day off. I mean we worked around the clock.

Was there a plant newspaper or a company newspaper?

Yes, there was. There was a kind of a little news brief that they would put out every month, and then it would tell about the people who had done particular things, or someone's family, if they had done something. And also there was news on the war, the war effort, you know. This gentleman had come home on leave or things of that nature.

Was the plant segregated at all or not?

No, it was not.

Were there jobs that only men did?

(Pause)

I think at that time, yes, perhaps there was. There were certain types of job that only the men did it.

Like what would those kind of jobs be?

Well, it would be like the electrical work. There was a lot of electrical things to be done. And also steam fitters. I mean people that went out and put the things around the pipes. There were typical jobs that only men could do. I think perhaps now with this liberation thing that probably women could do it, too. But at that time, it seemed to be strictly for the gentlemen.

Were there any jobs that only members of a certain race did, that you remember?

Not to my knowledge.

Do you remember any morale boosting efforts, like promotions that they had there to get people's morale up toward the war?

Oh, I think that they had incentives to work on. I mean they would always encourage you to do your job and do it well. And then produce so much powder that we could--it was an incentive just to do the best work that you could do. I mean they always complimented you on a good job.

Do you remember if the plant received any Army/Navy E Awards?

Yes, they did. Several.

Or other awards that they received?

I don't know about the other award, but I know they received some E Awards. In fact, they had flags flying, at the entrance to the plant with the E on them.

Did your ideas about working there change with time?

No, I've always been very happy that I was there. I thought it was a wonderful place to work.

When did your job end, after World War II?

Nineteen, forty-six. I was one of the last persons to leave the lab.

And how did that all happen? Do you remember? Everything was in production and then . . . ?

I remember when Germany surrendered. The plant closed for they day. That was just a bonus. And then after that, as the war started decreasing--I mean we were becoming more victorious and everything--slowly we started replacing people,--not replacing them--but letting them go, because the demand for powder was

not as great. Let's put it that way. And as the demand for powder decreased, then of course personnel would have to decrease. So little by little, they would lay off people, but they always laid them off according to seniority. The last person hired would be the first person to go. And that was the way it was done. Then when it got down to the very minimum, the skeleton crews, they gave you a choice. If you wanted to volunteer to take a layoff, you could do that. Because by that time, some of the men were starting to come home, some of the women wanted to be home with their families, and they would just as soon take the layoff, rather than waiting maybe two or three months and then get laid off anyway. So there was a volunteer effort there.

Is that what you did?

No, I stayed until I was laid off. Because we lived right across the street, there was no need for me--and my husband was home--there was no need for me to take the layoff, and so I stayed and let the other girls go.

Was the plant put on standby after World War II, then?

Yes, it was.

Do you remember when that was?

That was probably in 19-late-46. Forty-six or '47 probably at sometime. I don't know just exactly when they put it on a standby basis.

What was that like?

Well, the production of powder, of course, ceased. But there's--oh my goodness--just lots and lots of equipment that had to be cleaned and preserved and checked and stored. That was part of our job at the lab. We had to take all the equipment down, all the [inaudible], and all the ovens and things, and put them away and put them in storage. So that was a process.

What have they done at the plant in the years since World War II?

After it was put in standby in the '40s, then during the '50s, it was opened up again to make powder again for the next war. They called back several of the people that worked there previously.

Do you know about how long that took to get it running again?

Oh, it was less than six months I think it was in operation again. Because everything was there to go. All it had to do was be cleaned up a little, and then it could be put into operation again.

And then what about after that?

Well, after the '50s, then it was also put in standby again, and then it was re-opened in 1966.

For . . . ?

The third time. The third time it was re-opened. I'd worked there in the '50, and I also worked there in the '60s and '70s.

In the same area?

In the same building. (Laughs). In the same building.

How was the pay at the plant?

Excellent. It was very good.

How would you compare the pay at the plant, during World War II, to other places around the area?

Oh, it was much better. It was much better. We had a very fine base pay.

Was the pay the same for everyone doing the same kind of jobs, like men and women?

I think so, ah-huh.

Did people around here generally save their money during World War II, or did they spend a lot of money during World War II?

I think a lot of them bought homes. I think they saved their money. Of course, at that time, everybody was taking money out in savings bonds, because that was part of the incentive at the plant, you know, was to buy bonds. I think a lot of them saved their money.

How were people in the community getting along during the war?

Very nice. They were friendly and they associated together, and I think they accepted the people that came here from away. Lots of people made very fine, long lasting friends.

Were there any problems with juvenile delinquency or with children, during that time, that you recall, around here?

Not to my knowledge, no. I think everybody worked together and helped each other.

What did people do for entertainment during the war?

Well, speaking for myself, as I say, we lived at Badger Village. They had a recreation center at the plant. It was a building that was apart from the plant itself. We called it the rec building, and it was spacious. You could go over there and have pot luck dinners, and they had a juke box [and] you could have dances, you could have card parties, and because of the situation, during the war, where there was no gasoline and very few tires to get, we could not get in the car and go places. So we had to make our own fun, which is what we did. I mean we would go to the rec building and a gang of us would get together and dance and play cards and have pot luck suppers, and kids and all would come. I mean it was a family affair.

Did anybody gamble?

Not to my knowledge. There wasn't much gambling at all.

Did the plant or your local community, were there people that planned recreational activities, or were you basically just on your own to [inaudible]?

Mostly on our own. They did have some functions going on that they would sponsor, but most of it was voluntary, on your own.

Did the local communities and the plant encourage long-time residents to meet other people, did they have any activities where the purpose was for the new people to meet the people that have lived here a long time?

Well, as I say, I didn't live in Baraboo at the time. I lived at the Village, but everyone was very open. I mean, and you didn't have to wait for a formal invitation or anything like that or a formal introduction. People that worked together just naturally flowed together and just communicated very well.

Did the general population increase?

Yes, it did.

By about how much do you think?

I think Baraboo in the 1940s was possibly--I'm trying to think--around four to five thousand people, I do believe, in that area. And a lot of the people that came to Badger to work stayed here. I mean they started businesses. If they didn't go on to a business, they worked in plants, and I think a lot of them stayed here because--the population has increased almost twice as much as it was then, and this is 20 to 50 years, of course, but I think a lot of people stayed here.

Was there temporary housing set up for people?

Yes, Badger Village. And they also had a barracks there for people who did not want to have a home and they were single. They had a barracks [inaudible]. And it was mostly men that stayed there.

What kind of a facility did you live in?

(Laughs). They were rather poorly constructed, and they were in one long unit. There would be several apartments in the unit. You had a kitchen with shelves, no doors on the shelves, just open shelves, you had a living room with a coal burning stove in it. You had to get your own coal. There was a coal box outside the door. You had to get your coal and bring it in and fire the stove. Had one closet off the living room, a very small bath, and in our case, we had two children, so we only had one bedroom.

One bedroom for the four of you?

Yes. So it was small. And the floor was mostly plywood, and the windows were kind of the slide affect, you know, where you slide it back and forth. It was adequate, and we were all the same. I mean there wasn't any difference. I mean everyone had a unit and everyone lived the same. We walked to work, because they had built a path from Badger Village to the plant; so most everyone walked to work.

Did you have to cross the street?

Yes, you had to cross the road.

Was there a lot of traffic?

No, no. At that time, there were lots of buses, because people couldn't drive. There were lots and lots of buses. They would come from (Springgreen?) and (Cassanovia?) and (Reedsberg?), Portage. Most of the workers came by bus. Were many, many buses bringing in people to work there.

Did they have to pay for those buses?

Yes.

So you all walked to work together?

Most of us did, m-hm. We'd all string along, you know, and you'd find people that were going at the same time, and you got to know them; so we'd walk together.

What else did they have at that village?

They had a cafeteria over there at the barracks, that was an excellent place to eat. It was also 24 hours. You could go there anytime and eat, have breakfast or lunch or dinner or just go over there and sit and have coffee. It was kind of a meeting place, too, for most people.

Did you have to come to town to get anything, ever, like groceries?

No, they had a grocery store there, an A & P Store. They had a grocery store, a very nice A & P, they had a drug store, a pharmacy, they had a beauty shop for the ladies, a barber shop for the gentlemen and a post office. Actually, all your necessities were there, but people used to come, and a lot of people didn't have cars, and of course, we could not get gas. I mean this was another thing; gas was rationed. So it was a common practice for anyone that was going to Baraboo,--for instance, a doctor appointment or a dentist appointment--if they were going in to town, they would tack on the bulletin board their name, their unit number, because all the units were number, what time they were leaving and what time they were returning. If you wanted to go with them, you could meet them there, or if you wanted them to get your something, you could contact them. You might say, for instance, if you needed a pair of shoes or a pair of over shoes or something that you couldn't get out there, you'd go to these people and they would be very happy to do what they could for you, because everybody had to work together. Instead of driving in alone, and say, "Well, I've got to go and pick up this," they would make sure that everybody that needed something should contact them and they would bring it back to them.

Is there anything else that you can tell me about that village?

I wish I would have kept a diary, because it was a delightful experience. Now, that I'm this old and I think back on it, it was a delightful experience.

Was it crowded, was it uncomfortable?

No. No, I don't think so. I don't think it was.

Were there ever any times when the water or sewer was not . . . ?

Oh, sure. We had all kinds of problems with water raising up because the pipes were all practically on top of the ground. And people would have fires because they wouldn't take care of their coal stoves and things like that, but everybody kind of helped out. I mean if you had a problem or you needed something, somebody was always there to hand it out to you. It was like a big, happy family.

About how many people were there when you were there?

Oh, my goodness. I think there were 50-some units there, and they were one, two, three, four . . . there were eight houses in each unit.

Okay. That's a lot of people.

That's a lot of people. A thousand.

We drove by there and noticed that the school seems to be on one end, and then there's some stuff there that's remaining, but I have read that the school was once centrally located?

Yes, it was.

Can you sort of describe how that was set up then?

Wait a minute. I have [inaudible]. This would be Highway 12 down here. And this would be the main entrance into the plant. Here was the A & P Store, next was the A & P, next was the drug store--I think this was the drugs here--next was the beauty shop and the barber shop, and then down here was the post office. Now, the units lined up this way. Now, these would be the fronts. They would face each other . . . (writing) . . . like this, like this. This is where we lived right here, and they went way back here. Then they would--this was kind of a parking area. The school was situated right here. Right here. And then there were units all the way--and this was kind of a parking area in here. And then there were units here, here, and then it was the same way over here. All these were units, and it went way back. But the school was here. All the activity was in the middle, and there was a main highway going in this road and a main highway going down here. And then there were roads that would go across, like this, where you could go (marking). But this was your main activity.

Did they have any other kinds of units? Did they have trailer homes or did they have houses?

Yes, they had trailer homes and the path went to the plant, went like this. It was a curved path. Then over here were the long barracks. Now, there was an open area here, and over here were the long barracks like this. And then the cafeteria sat here like this. And then in between they put trailers (marking). There were trailer homes in here. This is a trailer park in here (marking). And this is the barracks.

And the barracks was only for single people?

Yes, m-hm. This was the mess hall is what they called it. But that was about the way . . . let's see. Yeah, this would be right, because this would be the north and this would be the south, and this would be the east and that would be the west. Yeah, it lays just like that.

And this path, was it a bridge going over the road?

No. No, it was just a black-top. And then the farmers would put corn in here, and lots of times I know they'd put corn in here, and lots of time, I'd know . . . I was always kind of afraid of the dark; so when I would go to work, I'd start singing, because I always felt well if you sing and they hear me, (chuckles) they'd leave me alone, because I can't sing.

(Laughing)

So you went to work in the dark [inaudible]

In the dark, oh, yes. Yes, many times, and you'd walk home in the dark. M-hm. But it was always nice. There were people around, you know, that you could talk to and, as I say, everybody was doing the same thing. We were coming and going at the same times. But it was a delightful experience.

What was the difference between the barracks and what you were living in?

Well, here--oh! By the way, I forgot to tell you. We also had a laundromat there; so that we could do. . . . What a lot of the men did is they had women at home taking care of their [family]; so they would come and stay here for the week. And then they would go home on weekends.

These are people mostly from elsewhere?

Yes, yes. These would be people from various areas around, yeah. A lot of them would stay here during the week and then go home at night. A lot of them had no families, single men, and they would stay there. But there was also a laundromat there. I forgot about that. Never thought of that till just now.

Do you think that there was a higher incidence of illness during the war because of all these people or not?

No, I don't think so. Huh-uh. It seemed like I had--there were very few illnesses. They were all quite healthy.

How would you say that the Baraboo area changed during this time, or even not necessarily just Baraboo, but how people's morals changed or their values changed, compared to before the war started?

Well, I think a lot of them . . . I really don't know how to answer that.

Or do you think it changed at all?

I don't think it changed at all, really. I think their values remained the same.

What about their ideas of what it was like to be wealthy or their ideas of money? Did that change during the war, compared to before the war?

No, I don't think so. We had just come out from a very serious depression. I mean and all of us were in the same situation with no money. And we were always very grateful I think to get the salaries that we did down there, and we were happy that--it could buy us a few of the necessities that we'd probably sacrificed before. So we were very grateful.

(End of Side 1, Tape 1, Beginning of Side 2)

This is Side 2. Today is Tuesday, February 15th, 1995. This is Deborah Crown and I am speaking with Laverna Hackett. And you were going to tell a story about Badger Village?

As I say, we had very little activity there because we couldn't go places or do things; we had no means. So we always made our own fun. And I remember there were a group of us that used to get together on holidays, you know, special days. And we had no place to go and we had time off, so we'd you come over to my house and have a drink to celebrate like New Years Eve. Fine. So we'd have a couple come over to the house. We'd sit there and have a drink. Well, let's go over and see Mary and John. So the four of us would go and see Mary and John. We'd do the same thing there. We'd sit and talk a bit and have a drink. Well, Bill and Jane are down at the corner and I know they're sitting there all alone. Let's go visit them. So before the evening was over, I think there were about 30 of us squeezed into those little tiny units, sitting on the floor, on each others' laps sometimes, but just enjoying it, having a good time talking and relaxing, because as I say, we all worked hard, we spent a lot of time at the plant, we were all very dedicated. But it was a fun time, and I wish I would have kept a diary. Because I would have loved to have read it. And my son had gotten his first pair of glasses. We'd take, and we had to go to Madison to get his glasses. We got his first pair of glasses. And Keith came home, and I said, "Keith, where are your glasses?" "Well, they broke, Ma. That's why I threw them away." We had to go back to Madison and get another pair of glasses. Evidently the nose piece broke and they were out playing, and he thought, "Well, they're broke. They're no good." (Laughs).

Did you get days off when you asked for them?

Yes, they were very considerate. They were very considerate.

In case you had to take your children somewhere or so something?

Right. My oldest son had problems. He had Rheumatic Fever when he was young, and the nurses would call me home on occasion, when Keith would run a fever. They'd say well you better come home and take him out of the nursery and have him at home. And they were very good. They'd always give you time off. They were very thoughtful.

Did they call a replacement right away for you [inaudible]?

Usually, our lab had adequate help that someone would step right in and take over where you left off. I mean we were very flexible. Our job, we had to be able to do everything. I mean there were many, many jobs to be done, and the part of the work there was to be trained in every phase of the lab work, so that if someone was absent today, for instance they had a cold, they didn't come into work, someone could take their job. No position was ever left empty. I mean there was always someone that could do it.

How did they train you?

Well, you have a manual to follow, but, of course, you have supervision to begin with, and they teach you exactly how you have to do it and your responsibilities, and you just go from repetition.

Was your job dangerous at all?

No, I don't think so. The only danger that the job might have been was the chemicals that you worked with. They were very dangerous chemicals, things like ether, acetone, alcohol, cyanide, things of those natures that you had to become aware of their potential danger to you; so you would use extreme caution. You'd wear your face mask, and you'd wear your glasses, you'd wear your rubber gloves when you had to do those things.

Was there a curfew at the Village?

No, there was no curfew.

Did anybody dislike the plant during World War II because it made munitions?

No, I don't think so. I think so, as I say, everyone was very patriotic and they knew this had to be done.

What about during Korea or Vietnam?

During Vietnam I think there was a little more dissention, you know, the fact that it was debatable about whether we should be there or not, and I do think that sometimes the people thought, "Well, what are we really doing here? Why are we doing this?"

You mean among the workers at the plant?

No, not so much among the workers. I think the people that worked there were all dedicated to the fact that they had to do a job, and this had to be done. But I mean the people outside the plant sometime would question why are you there and what we were doing over there.

Were there any protests that you remember?

Yes, there was protest. It was during the Vietnam War. There was a group from Madison that came up and protested. There was even a time when they were very disturbed because they thought there was going to be a bombing there. They had warned everybody that the plant was going to be bombed, but it wasn't, of course.

Did you stay there? Were you there?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We were there.

Were you nervous?

No, I wasn't, because I was sure that with the security there that--and they knew of this ahead of time--I was sure that, in my own mind, I was confident that it would be taken care of properly.

Did anything happen from that?

No. No. It was just one of those things that--I don't know if there was actually going to be a bombing or if it was a vicious rumor or what. We did have some very serious explosions there. I mean we did have some people killed.

When was that?

That was during World War II.

Were you there?

Yes.

What was that like?

It was frightening. It was frightening for the fact that we didn't want anyone to be killed or lose anybody's lives, but we also didn't want the plant to be disrupted because we knew we had to make powder. And if a serious explosion happens, it could tie up the lines for months. And this happened to be the rocket line. It was important that that line stay open.

Did people keep working?

Oh, yes. Very definitely. Nobody flinched.

When it blew up--I'm sure you heard it?

Yes. In fact, I was home at the time and I heard the explosion. And we did go over to the plant. We went over to the main gate to inquire as to was anyone hurt? And unfortunately, yes, there were two of them killed. But we went to work at our regular schedule.

Do you remember the plant having any other accidents, later even?

No, nothing of great consequence. I think they had two accidents. But the safety was priority. The men that worked in the safety department were always out inspecting; they were checking everything and they

tried to keep track of everything. If there was a problem, there would someone to take care of it. We had a very good safety record.

Was there a particular area of the plant that was more dangerous than another area?

Yes, the nitroglycerin lab, or the nitroglycerin area, was very dangerous. Not only was it dangerous to work there, but you had to be very [inaudible], and another thing, you got very, very ill. I mean, as you know, nitroglycerin is a heart medication and it absorbs through the skin. And if you should put a little bit on a table and then happen to touch it, it absorbs and you get violent headaches. Your head just throbs. You can hardly see sometimes you get so sick.

So did a lot of people that worked there have that problem?

Yes. When they first started working in the nitroglycerin lab, they did have occasions to have a lot of headaches, but it's also something that you can become adjusted to. I mean you can tolerate it after a while.

Do you think people have long term health problems from working there?

No, I don't think so.

Were there any safety meetings?

Frequently. Yes, frequently safety meetings.

And where would those be and who would be present?

Usually what the safety department would do, they would select an area, like if they would come to the lab and give a safety talk, then the people within the lab would attend. And then you'd go to different areas in the plant. They would go like to the powder line, the finishing area that we called it, or they would go to the nitro-cotton area, and they would give safety talks throughout the different areas. They would schedule them, of course, at different times of the week.

So how often would you go to those meetings?

Oh, they had them at least once a month.

And would it be new things that they'd come up with, or was it just more of a reminder?

Just a reminder and just to tell you that you're doing a good job, remember that you must always be safe, do everything right.

So when you did that, was it a break from work?

Yes. You just [inaudible].

Did other people take over your . . . ?

Yes. Usually we would do it in shifts. You know, like one group would get it one time. Then another group would get it.

But the plant was always . . .

Always going.

There was always the same amount of people in your department no matter what you were doing?

Right.

Did people have to wear special clothing?

Yes, they did. We had to wear heavy shoes with steel caps in the toes because of accidents. The people on the lines wore coveralls that would completely cover--they also wore hoods for their hair so their hair wouldn't get anything. Lots of places had to wear glasses or goggles. In the lab, we were required to wear our safety shoes, lab coats, goggles. Always safety glasses. Everyone had to wear safety glasses. And certain jobs you were required to wear a face mask and gloves.

What was a face mask like?

Well, it's just a band that goes around you and then it has a complete shield that comes down to here. Your whole face is covered. And around like this.

It comes down below your neck and then around . . . ?

Yes, around the side. M-hm.

Does it go around your ears, too?

Well, just to the side, right here. So it protected the face.

Did you ever hear anything about the people in the community not feeling safe or not . . . ?

There were comments made. I think perhaps more about the acid area, because the acid area, when they would make acid, nitric acid has a very distinct smoke. It's a bright reddish, kind of a copperish red, and when they would make the acid, the smoke fumes, the acid fumes would come out these chimneys and that would go [inaudible] across the sky. People did object to that. And it smells. It wasn't a pleasant odor.

How did the war and the existence of the plant affect every day life in the area, as far as the availability of housing? Were there new houses being built for all these people that lived here?

Not at that time, no, because there was no construction at all, because there wasn't any lumber. I mean things were very, very tight. Now, for instance, I think this house is one of them, right here. This was, at one time, a one unit house. And it's now a two unit house, and that was built, I think, in the '40s. You know, transferred in the '40s, split, and it made two units. And I think a lot of people did that. They just broke down their own homes and made small apartments.

What about the availability of food?

Meat was very difficult to get. And sugar, of course, was [inaudible] and my husband and I decided we didn't need sugar in our coffee anymore. And so we quit using sugar because it was difficult, and gasoline was very hard to get, sugar was hard to get, meat was very--you had to have ration stamps. You had so many ration stamps issued per month. Like if you wanted to buy a beef roast, maybe they would take 25 of your stamps.

And how many would you take a month?

I think about 100. You didn't get very many. So you had to ration it. I mean unfortunately we had a friend who had a meat market here in town. In fact, that's the lady that I was talking to this morning, and on occasion, he would say we have an extra ration. You can get another extra roast, which was very nice. But it was difficult.

What about the quality of life?

I think it was one of the most enjoyable periods in my whole life. I simply had so many friends. Everybody was on an equal basis. I mean we did things together, everybody, seemed to be happy and enjoying themselves. Monetary things didn't mean that much. I think people enjoyed themselves. I think they were very happy. We would do things. We'd bowl together, we'd go out and play baseball, we'd get together and kick the footballs around, play with the kids, go sliding, simple things.

Would you say that most of the women that worked at the plant had worked outside the home before they had their job at the plant, or do you think that was their first job outside the home?

I think a lot of them that was their first job away from home. I really do.

Did a lot of them want to keep working after the plant was placed on standby after World War II?

I think most of them did, yes. I think that they enjoyed getting out and working and contributing something to the family.

Did many of them find jobs outside the plant?

I think they did, yes.

Like what kind of jobs?

Oh, a lot of the girls went into waitress work. Some of them went to school, which I was very happy for. Some of them went to cosmetology. I know a couple of girls in the lab went to Minneapolis and became lab technicians. I think it was a general thing that they did go on with their lives.

Do you think that had an affect on the local job market or the local economy during the reconversion to peace time, when the [inaudible]?

No, I don't think so. I say that thinking that so many of the people that were working there came from such a very wide area that it wasn't concentrated just here in Baraboo. I mean the people at the plant sometimes would drive 60 miles a day to get to work. That's one way. So when the plant quit, these people all went back to their residences, wherever they were; so that kind of evened things out. Buses used to come from [inaudible] to the plant.

And how far is that?

Oh, that's almost 70 miles (slight pause) a day. They'd drive back and forth on a bus.

And round the clock, too? Do you remember any labor shortages, at the plant, where they were really needing people to work there?

No, I can't say that I do. The reason I can say that is because the wage scale has always been very good, so they've always had adequate people to come in and take a job.

What kind of people stayed on long after the plant went on standby, after World War II. Who stayed on who left right away?

Well, I think that the people that lived within the Baraboo area itself stayed on the longest, because there are people who are living in Baraboo now who had worked there whose sons and daughters [are] still here. So I think the local area, like [inaudible], North Freedom, Portage, (Reedsberg?), Baraboo, I think those people were here, stayed the longest. Stayed here in the community.

Did this community change somehow after the war ended that you noticed?

I don't really know if it did or not. I don't think that it did. I don't think Baraboo has changed a great deal.

What about Badger Village? Did people just start moving out, or were they supposed to move out? Were you told to leave or not?

Well, most of them were happy to leave because, as I say, the living conditions weren't that great. But the nice thing about it, as the boys came home from the war, a lot of them wanted to go to the University. So the Badger Village was converted to a barracks for the people who wanted to go to school. They would bring their wives and family and live at Badger, and they could go to school. So a lot of the people that moved out were making way for these kids who were coming home.

What about your family?

Well, my husband and I both worked there and when we finished the plant, we moved back to Baraboo.

Was it hard to find a house right away?

Yes, it was very difficult. In fact, the only reason that we could get a house was because Prescott's folks bought a house on Third Street and they were moving out of theirs. So we moved into the one they moved out of.

Is that a friend of yours? Whose parents?

My husbands'. And so we moved into their house, and Scotty went to work for the Power and Light, and I went to work for JC Penney.

What did you do with your children then?

Well, the boys were getting up pretty good size by that time, and there was a young lady that was in Baraboo here that was looking for a home to stay in. She was going to start high school, and she needed a place to live. So she came and lived with us. And the deal was that Wanda would be the baby sitter. I mean she'd live with us, go to school and at night, she would come home from school and be there when the boys got home. And she lived with us for four years . . . until she got out of high school.

So you decided that you wanted to stay in the job market, then, after you were done?

Yes, m-hm. M-hm.

Why was that?

Well, (Chuckles) I think it was probably greed. (Laughs). Monetary value. At that time, we didn't have a home, we needed furniture, because the furniture that we had at Badger was very, very old, rickety, we needed furniture, we needed a car, the boys were growing up; they needed a lot of things, and we just had to start putting things together to make a better life for ourselves. And I enjoyed working, I guess, after getting out into the working circle. I enjoy the people. I've always enjoyed people.

Do you think that the presence of the plant, during World War II, made the war a more real event to this local community or not?

Oh, I'm certain that it did. It was very prominent in most people's mind. Of course, you must understand, at that time, there was no television or no anything. Everything that we got was either from the radio or from word of mouth from someone else. Communication was quite limited. And of course the newspapers, and thing didn't get as passed around as quickly as it would today, with the TV.

Do you think it would have felt the same around here even if the plant wouldn't have been here?

No, I don't think so. I think it brought home a realization that we are in trouble, we need help. Let's get going on this.

After the war was over and you'd been working there for a while and your friends had been working there for awhile, and you started doing the reconversion to peace time, everybody was getting back to a regular, normal life, did you miss the war?

Not the war. I missed the job. I enjoyed my job; I enjoyed very, very much working in the lab. I enjoyed the people. I had wonderful supervisors and I missed the money. It was great money.

Did you take a pay cut, then, to . . . ?

Oh, definitely, yes.

Did your husband?

Yes, m-hm. But the work was fascinating. It was very challenging.

After the war was over, what kind of a role did you originally expect the plant to have in community life? What did you originally think would happen to the plant?

I expected the plant to do exactly what it's doing. I think it should be there and I don't think it should be let go. Because you never know what is going on. Who can foresee the future? I know a lot of my friends are still working there. A lot of them have retired, younger friends, but I don't think that we should ever give it up. It's a tremendous installation. As I say, who knows what tomorrow's going to bring. And if we need it, we should have it available.

Are there people that think that it should be permanently closed?

Oh, yes. There are quite a few people that feel that it's a very costly thing to have down there. It's costing a lot in the tax dollars, it's taking a lot of money away from other things that could be using the money. I'm sure there are a lot of people that feel that way.

But you don't feel that way?

No, I feel that we have to have a national security and I think this is part of it.

Does the plant's existence have much of an affect on this area now or not?

There are people that are still very bitter about the land. It is the land that is important. They resent the fact that their farms are gone.

People still feel that way?

Oh, some of the older people still feel that they're very resentful about losing all their beautiful land. In fact, I have friends that are still griping about it. By the way, did you know that there is a video out?

Yes, Powder on the Prairie?

Have you seen it?

No, not yet, but we're planning to.

That is the story of the acquisition of the land, and there are two people in that video that are very good friends of mine. John Licher and Bill Gitchey. And they are two of the people that are still very unhappy about their land acquisition. And they did do it rather rapidly. I mean they didn't do it with a lot of finesse.

Was that hard on your friendship, you working there?

No, no. Nothing has ever arisen that could ever say that because I was working there spoiled our friendship. No.

Do you remember the transition from the Construction Era to the Production Era?

From what I remember, my brother-in-law worked out there as an electrician. And from what I remember, they did it by piecemeal. You see, the plant had consisted of many things. We got lines, different lines, areas. We've got A Line, B Line, C Line and D Line. Each one of these lines is a complete unit in itself. Do you know what I mean? You start with Section A. This is the start of the powder. It goes onto the line and when it gets down to here, it's a finished product. What they did is they started one line. They completed that. So production could start immediately on this line. Then they would work on this line, and as soon as that was completed, they would hire more help and get this line going.

And they're making different things in each?

They can, they could. And that's the way it started. So they started with one line. They got this line done. Get your people out there and get them to work and were producing powder. Then in the meantime, get working on this one.

Instead of starting them all?

Right.

And then taking longer to ever get anything out.

So when they got all the small arms powder going, then they built back here, in the back area, way back by the [inaudible], they built was called the Rocket Area. So when we got these things going, then they started working on the Rocket Area. When the Rocket Area got going, get more people out there and get the Rocket Line up. So this is the way it happened. So it was a very simple transition. So you start with one thing. You get this line started, you get it completed and you produce. Then you work on the second line. And that's how the production got to be so amassed. Because all of a sudden, all of the lines were working.

Is there anything else that you can recall that I might not have asked about?

I think you've done a good job. I think you've asked a lot of questions. I hope I've given all the good answers.

Oh, yes, you have. Okay, well if there's nothing else, then thank you very much.

Oh, you're welcome.

(End of Interview)

ELROY HIRSCH
February 23, 1995
Madison, Wisconsin
Deborah L. Crown, Interviewer

Today is Thursday, February 23, 1995. This is Deborah Crown, and I'm speaking with Elroy Hirsch. This is side 1.

How long have you lived in this area?

In this Madison area? Since I came back and took the job. I guess it's been close to 20 years now.

Where were you living when you heard that the Ordnance Plant was going to be built?

Here in Madison. I was a student at the university and it was just a bit of news. The war was the big thing, but when we heard of Badger Ordnance, it was kind of out of it for us. It was too big for us to realize what it was.

Were you working at all, or just going to school?

No, I was a student [*inaudible*], and then we all joined the Marine Corps. There's a whole group of us from the '42 football team all wanted to serve together. So we all went down and joined the Marine Corps and they put us, because we were college students, they put us in a Marine Corps Reserve, and we had to wait to be called up. Therefore, we were seeking employment. We didn't go to school that second semester.

What was the reaction of most people in the area when they heard about the Ordnance Plant?

That'd be tough for me to answer, because it was built long before I was associated with the area. It was an up and going concern when I worked up there. But I understand there was a lot of pro and con about it, especially I guess when they tested shells, they went back in the hills, and they had some caves and things they said that they tested and there was a lot of booming going on and what not. I guess to a lot of other people there was a lot of fear about espionage. Here was a big powder plant and what was the enemy going to do? Going to come in and try to blow it up and that sort of thing. Or if the United States was ever bombed, would that be a target?

Did you ever see the construction site when it was being built?

No. No, it was all built by the time I got up there.

How did you find out about the job at the Ordnance Plant?

Good question. I was some place at a meeting and we'd all just joined the Marine Corps, waiting for our call up, and we had roughly six months to wait. And I was someplace and they said, "Hey, why don't you -- they're looking for people up at the Badger Ordnance Plant." And I went up and applied, and a friend of mine was a guard up there, and so he put me on the list for guard duty and I got the call.

Did some of the other people that joined the Marine Corps, were they interested in working there, too?

None that I know of, no. I was the only one that caught the bus on University Avenue at 4:00 in the morning, which was tough, and had to ride to Baraboo. That's if you had the daylight shift. There were

three shifts, obviously. You did it around the clock. And there was the afternoon shift. The graveyard shift was the tough one.

Which shift did you work?

You alternated. You rotated. You worked your way up to the daylight shift. That was nice. You'd get your normal night's sleep and go out and work in the day time. But working from 12:00 at night till 8:00 in the morning. That was the tough one. And you'd sit up in these guard shacks and they were heated, of course, in the winter. And you had a flashlight, and a squad car came around and patrolled inside the fence. And as the squad car approached you, you had to take your flashlight and blink it to let them know you were awake, and they would flash their spotlight back in acknowledgment, and then go on down to the next tower. But to keep you awake also, they'd start a man from the guard shack, which was at the main gate, and walk him to the first guard tower, and then that guy in the guard tower would come down and be replaced by that [guy], and he'd walk to the second guard. You'd bump each other. And they'd do that about every two hours to keep you awake.

That's during the graveyard . . . ?

So it wasn't so monotonous sitting there for eight hours in a guard shack.

Before you started working there, what did you think that kind of a job would be like?

I really had no idea. Badger Ordnance, when you'd drive up that way, you heard the booming. They were testing the powder with big guns, firing into some caves up there, but that's about all I was told. It was very hush-hush. And it was strictly off limits for everybody. It was all fenced in and it wasn't a site seeing thing, where you could go up and park and go in and look around. Everybody was kind of tense during that part of the war. It was very early. You thought we might be bombed any time and that sort of thing.

Why did you want to work there?

Well, number one, to make money, (chuckles), but it was a very good available job. A man came in and recruited. They wanted young people to be the guards to walk around, I suppose, and we had to practice shooting a firearm at least twice a week--they'd a range up there. We all carried revolvers, and loaded. And we all got pretty proficient with them, just in case something would ever happen.

In which building or area did you work?

All I remember, I came through the main gate, and I went to a guard shack, and then they took you out in squad cars and went along the fence line and dropped you off where you were going to work, if you weren't in a tower. For instance, a tough part of the job was walking over and searching the workers who were there, because you were not allowed to have any form of matches or a cigarette lighter or anything that might become inflammable, especially those working in a restricted area, where they had a red snow fence around these areas where when you walked in you couldn't carry a match, a book of matches or a cigarette lighter, for instance. It was very dangerous to do so. So the toughest duty was walking into those areas and asking a man to empty his pockets, and if you found a book of matches, he was off work for two weeks without pay. So that was tough.

Did you do that every day that you went to work there, or was that something that you switched off doing?

You were assigned for a week at a time. And you picked up the investigational duty or you got a guard up on one of the outposts, or you could be at a gate. So in January or February you kind of hoped you'd be

inside. (Laughs) But the guard towers were heated, and the only time you got cold was when you walked from one to the other.

Can you describe an average day?

Well, you weren't allowed any . . . and being in a tower, you're up there for an hour or two, and you weren't allowed reading material, because you're supposed to be alert all the time and looking around, and so the time went by very slowly.

Was there anything that you could do to make the time go by faster? Did they allow . . . ?

No, you're supposed to just be there and observing, and every, oh, 20 minutes a patrol car would go by and shine his spotlight up at you and you were supposed to answer with your flashlight. They were just double checking you weren't dozing off up there, and so, and they came by, you gave the signal, then they went right by. But if they received no answer, they'd stop the squad car and come up and wake you. (Laughs)

Did that ever happen to you?

No. Thankfully not.

What about when you were searching the workers? What was that like? Did you just do that constantly all day, or was it just . . . Were people coming in all the time?

Well, just when the shifts changed. There were three shifts. And the shift would come in and they'd go through a series of gates electronically, and then the metal detectors and that sort of thing, and then they'd say do you have any flammables, and they'd say no. Nine times out of ten, you'd let them go, because they were seasoned workers. But you'd spot check to make sure, just to put the fear in the other people. And you'd bring them over to an area where there was large tables and they'd say, "Empty your pockets." And they'd have to empty everything out of all of their pockets. And if there was a book of matches or something, you just took it away at that point, but when you were on patrol of the workers--and there was a lot of construction going on all the time--so you'd walk among the construction workers and spot check.

Even the construction workers?

Yeah. And say, "Empty your pockets." They were inside the building, in the powder plant. So you'd say, "Empty your pockets," and if a book of matches or something came out, you'd have to report them, and they'd get two weeks without pay.

Did you ever report anyone?

No. Never caught anybody.

Were there a lot of people that were caught that you know of or not?

Oh, no. No. They all respected the rule I'm sure. It was tough, but if you were working in the powder plant, per se, making the powder, that's one thing, but working out in the yard, constructing, that was a pretty tough rule. They came under the same rules.

What kind of other rules were there that you guys typically enforced?

Well, you'd look for any . . . no drinking obviously, and no smoking obviously. There was certain areas they allowed it, but that was about it. All you did was you were a deterrent in a guard tower for anybody

to . . . I suppose for espionage or whatever. It seemed a little far fetched in Baraboo, Wisconsin, with the war going on in the South Pacific, but you never knew. This was a source of a supply; that was essential.

What about people being able to . . . were they allowed to walk freely around the plant without a problem?

There were certain hours that visitors could come in, and they had a little area where they showed what they were doing and all that sort of thing, but no, you couldn't go through the plant proper.

Were workers allowed to go anywhere they wanted to?

Oh, no. If you were authorized . . . you had certain colored badges, and there was restricted areas where you could not go. For instance, me as a guard, patrolling, I couldn't go in a certain area. It wasn't all encompassing badge.

So how many different kinds of badges do you remember?

Oh, I have no idea. I just had my guard badge and that's all I was worried about. I had more freedom than some others that were in a department, because you would be assigned, for instance, in a tower for a week, and then the next week, you'd be assigned something else. You might just be patrolling an area where workers were working. A lot of construction going on all the time, see.

What was that like with all the construction going on? Did it make things a little bit chaotic or not, or did it seem well organized?

Yeah, it was busier, but they . . . this wasn't high rise construction; this was one and two story buildings [inaudible] and mostly wooden frame, that sort of thing.

But things seemed to go smoothly with construction, then, from what you recall?

Oh, yes. Yeah. Everything was a precautionary thing. How do you know? Here's a big powder plant going up that's supposedly essentially to our war efforts, and who knows what somebody's going to try to deter that production? So this was just all precaution.

Was your job a union job or a non-union job?

I was not union. I was temporary help. I don't know if they had unions in those days. I don't know.

What were the working conditions like?

Well, a guard tower was a guard tower. You went up. There was three or four little flights of stairs. You sat up there, and it was heated, and there was a phone to headquarters.

Do you remember it as a good job, or was it tedious?

Oh, yeah. The midnight, the graveyard shift, you know, from 12:00 to 8:00 in the morning, that was a tough one, because that's your sleeping time. And that's why they bumped you from guard tower to guard tower; to keep you awake. But that was the toughest. And you weren't allowed anything to read. You were up there to look, you weren't there to read. And we all carried a lunch pail in those days, because we couldn't get time off to go to lunch someplace, [inaudible] or eating time.

Was there a cafeteria at the plant?

Yes.

Could you go there?

No, you couldn't get off your tower. [Inaudible] into the field or the area and come in for lunch then go back. You carried lunch.

How much time did they give you for lunch?

Didn't have lunch hours really. We worked steady [inaudible], with a lunch bucket.

How often would you work on one shift before they'd change you to another one?

Two weeks I believe it was.

Was it difficult to get used to sleeping during the day, then, and constantly changing your sleeping pattern?

At first, yes, but, you know, when you're young, at that age, you adjust a lot easier than you do [at] my age now.

Was this your first time ever to do this kind of work?

That kind of work, yeah. I'd worked in construction quite a bit in high school. I worked for a billboard company that built those big outdoor billboards. And then I worked for an insurance company up in [inaudible] employers [inaudible]. I was a mail boy, then construction, and then . . . no, I had never been a guard or anything.

Was this the first time you had worked for a big company?

Well, Employers of [inaudible] was a big company, but that was an entirely different type of work, obviously.

Do you consider that kind of a job a stressful job or not?

No, but I think at first, my first two or three weeks on the job, you know, up there, ready for anything. And then the older guards would kid you a lot, saying, "Now, you got to be careful. Up in this corner, with the marshes, if anything comes, it's going to come from there." And you'd be in that tower like (laughs). But then after two or three weeks, you got on to it. They were smart. They never left you in one spot too much. They bumped you all the time, going here, going there. So you never got well acquainted with one area. And see we all tried to dodge that searching job. None of us like that. These were construction guys that came in every day and were building buildings, and you had to go around and say, "Empty your pockets," and if just by chance a smoker happened to have a book of matches in his pocket, then it meant a week off without pay, and I didn't like that at all.

The other guard didn't seem to like doing that either?

Nobody wants to have people lose their livelihood. I'm sure we turned our heads a little, too.

What do you think about the Ordnance Plant's role in the defense effort? How important was it?

Well, I would guess if they're shooting something and it takes gun powder, (chuckles) I'm sure . . . that's what they were manufacturing. I'm sure it was essential. But it's just amazing to me that in the middle of the United States we have a powder plant to be used in the Philippines. To get that all the way over. Of course, you've got a train, too.

Did you remember a lot of women working there?

In the plant proper, there were, but not as guards, no. Not that I recall.

Do you remember if the plant provided any sort of day care facilities for women that had children or anything like that?

No, I don't. I remember there was a cafeteria where we could come and have food, get there early or something before your shift started, or eat something after you got off. But I don't recall day care at all for children. Now, there might have been, but I, I was 19 years old so I wasn't into that kind of . . . (laughs).

Would you say that most of the women that worked at the plant, do you think that was their first job outside of the home or do you think that a lot of them had jobs outside of the home prior to starting to work at the plant?

I would say a lot of them were first timers I would guess. Because your work force was in the service, but if the war wasn't on, this work force was all home. There wasn't the need. But they filled a great void. I know when we were at Michigan, going to the [inaudible] program there at the university, a Deerborne and the Ford Plant and all those auto plants over there, women just responded tremendously to jobs there. There was a big, big story. They did a great job, too. I don't know what they'd have done without them.

Where were you when the war ended? Were you in this area?

I was at San Diego, on a dock, waiting to board a ship to go overseas when armistice was declared, when Japan surrendered. The happiest day of my life, I think, outside of getting married.

Do you remember a plant newspaper or a company newspaper?

Vaguely. Yeah, vaguely. There was a news thing they put out it seemed like.

Do you remember what kind of articles that it had?

Have no idea. Sorry. Assuming I could read them, (chuckles).

Were there certain jobs that only men did that no women did?

I don't recall women being on guard duty in a tower. I think there were guards, but I don't think they ever did get a tower duty. I don't think. Because I don't recall seeing a lot of them in the area where I worked at least. I'm sure in the plant there were women.

Did they have women searching women, or men searching women when they walked through the door, walked through the gate?

I never had that duty. I just walked through. But I don't recall ever . . . a woman, unless it was . . . you just had to empty your pockets. Then you went through metal detectors, of course, you know.

Were there certain jobs that only women did that you remember?

I have no idea. I never got in the plant proper, never.

Do you remember any morale boosting efforts that they had there, like to get people . . . to get their morale up?

I don't think so. I don't think there was any athletic activities, like did they have a baseball team or a softball team. I don't recall that at all. But of course I was up there in the winter. So I don't really know.

How about things that promoted the war effort that they asked people to do, like other places say they've had blood drives or bond drives.

If there were, I don't recall them. See, my life was a little different. I lived over here on West Johnson Street, and I got up and went around the corner to University Avenue, and a bus picked me up there on a corner and took me to the plant, and I did my eight-and-a-half hours or whatever it was, got on a bus and came back. I was not involved in any activities other than go to the guard shack or take pistol practice.

Were there a lot of people that came by bus, or did most people drive?

Oh, it was both, but you know there was gas rationing. And I suppose they got gas coupons for going to work in the defense plant, but no, our bus was full going up. It picked us up all the way out University Avenue, all the way out until we got to Baraboo.

And did you have to pay to ride that bus?

No. Not that I know of, unless something was taken out of the check. But I did not pay to get on the bus, no.

Did you notice a population increase in Madison at all, during that time, for people coming to work at the plant? Did a lot of people live here?

I don't think so, no. They had some housing units up near Baraboo, [inaudible], and I'm sure there were some workers from Madison, but I don't think it had influence on the population.

Do you remember any people of other races that worked there?

No, I don't. Not that I knew, acquainted wise, no. I never got acquainted with any.

Did your ideas about working at the plant change over time?

No. I think we got more at ease and got to know more people. We were less afraid of making a mistake and enjoyed it more, I think, as you got more confidence. But overall, I really enjoyed it.

When did your job end?

We'd all joined the Marine Corps, and we were waiting for our call, where we were going to go, and they put us in a [inaudible] program and sent us to Michigan, and [inaudible], and as I said, we were going to be sent to Michigan in the fall of . . . well, actually the end of July of 1943. So we all quit a couple weeks early to go home and get our stuff and get ready.

How was the pay at the plant?

For that time, very good. Very good. For a college kid, it was very good.

Was it better or about the same as other places in the area?

Oh, that'd be hard for me to say. I never worked other places, but wherever you had government plants and government projects, the pay was very good, as I understand, in comparison.

Did many people or most people save their money or spend a lot of money during World War II?

Tough to say.

What did you do?

I saved most of mine. I was going to get married after the war, and so. But the money wasn't a big number one, but it was very good. But it was nice to walk around having some money in your pocket, because where we were going, you made \$21 a month. That was a little tough. So you had to have a nest egg to carry you over those times. Money was very important.

Did people in the town, in Madison, seem to get along really well during that time, during World War II?

Oh, yes. Sure.

Was this the same for teenagers? I know a lot of them had their male role models were gone, their dad was gone, their brother was gone. Were there any problems with juvenile delinquency?

Not that I know of. The university had an army unit here. (Truax?) was going very big out here, had a big army unit, and ROTC, here on the campus, [inaudible] referred to as the army, still had their units. The army had men in uniform going to school here. I forget their designation, what they call it, but there was a lot of those on the campus. So the campus was crowded. Therefore it kept the businesses going. ASTP I believe it was called.

Were there a lot of people that moved into the area that wanted to go work at Badger?

More so at (Truax?) than at Badger. There were a lot here, but I think more of them stayed up toward Baraboo. That was a tough bus ride every day.

How long did it take?

I don't know. Probably 45, 50 minutes.

Because it made some stops?

The 4:30 in the morning, I was tired. And it was like these school buses [inaudible]. They weren't Greyhound, which I see out there. (Laughs)

What did people do for entertainment during World War II?

Dances. For instance, for students on the campus, the union had dances a lot, every Saturday and Sunday. And I don't know. People hung out there. There weren't a lot of people to hang out with. Everybody was--not everybody--but a lot of people were in the service. But baseball still went on in Madison, softball still

went on, winter basketball went on. The high school industrial teams. I played for a baseball team at Badger Sporting Goods all the time. So you kept busy. There was enough to do.

And there were a lot of activities . . . you weren't a student at the time though, when you were working, you weren't still taking classes?

Oh, no. No.

But did you still socially do things at the university then?

I still went to the union, because that was an inexpensive place to go and a nice place to go. But you went to the basketball games and the track meets were still going and that sort of thing.

How did you make the decision to . . . I guess I don't understand why you stopped going to school.

I joined the Marine Corps.

You did that because you had to or wanted to?

Well, if you were going to be drafted, college students coming up 21 years of age. This way, if I joined, I could choose the branch of service I wanted to go in. And I wasn't alone. There was like 11 of us off the football team. Went in and all got sworn in together. And then the rumble was if we do it that early, we could get into a [inaudible] program, and eventually go into officer's training, because we were college students, and that's what happened. We all joined the Marine Corps, we were put in the [inaudible] program and sent to Michigan for [inaudible] training. We were in uniform and we had to take drill every day and take military subjects, but we could also take other subjects to help us toward our degree at Wisconsin. The credits would count when the thing was over.

Do you remember if people gambled a lot during World War II?

Well, there were card games in the barracks and that sort of thing and dice games, yeah, if you call that gambling. But there were no casinos or things like that around.

Did the plant or local communities plan recreational activities? You said there were some things that still went on at the university, as far as sports.

Oh, yeah. The college students, they carried on with sports. There was still basketball and baseball and football.

But none of you played on the team?

No, I wasn't in school . . . [inaudible] I wasn't in school. I just worked. Remember, we had all joined the Marine Corps and we were waiting for our call. And then when they said it's going to be a month or two, we all looked for something to do. Got jobs.

What did that do to the football team?

This was after the '42 season. So we played the '42 season, and now we're coming into January '43, and that's when we all had to decide what to do. And we had a military advisor on the campus and he said the [inaudible] program that's coming out for college students is going to be the best thing for you. You might get another year of college out of it. So we all went down and joined the [inaudible]. And then we had to

sit by and wait for the call to go to [inaudible] because we'd already signed up. And when that gap was there, that four or five month gap, that's when we worked up at Badger.

What else did the other people that joined up with you do for work during that time?

I have no idea. Some worked at Oscar Mayer, and local construction, some didn't work, some went to school.

Was there any temporary housing that you can think of that was set up near Baraboo or anywhere around?

Yeah, sure. On our lower campus there was housing. Those were classroom [inaudible]. They set up quanset huts on the lower campus. Across the street from Memorial Union, those were all quanset huts, but they were temporary classrooms I think. But housing, they lived in our dorms.

Some workers lived in the dorms at Madison?

No, if you could get in, yeah. They were open, but the housing in Madison, everybody turned their homes open for rooming.

Even in Madison?

In Madison, sure.

Do you know anybody that did that?

I lived at A12 West Johnson Street, where I lived as a student, but after we were students, they let us stay there. Then I went over to North Murry for awhile, but there were a lot of people . . . obviously, between Madison and Baraboo, wherever there was any kind of housing, it was taken by workers.

Was there a curfew?

When?

During the time that you worked at the plant? Was there a curfew during World War II around here?

No. Tough to work the graveyard shift and have a curfew . . . (Laughs)

Did anyone dislike the plant because it made munitions?

No. I never saw a demonstration of any kind, I never heard of anything. Great comaraderie up there, I thought. In spite of not having a basketball team, you know, but just the workers getting together, they had a big mess hall kind of, where you could go and eat your lunch if you wanted to and a cafeteria, and that was kind of a gathering place. But it seems like the guards all hung together and then the workers all hung together. There wasn't a great comaraderie. Of course, you worked different shifts. You never got to know everybody.

Did you have time to meet people and talk to people or were you mostly working alone?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. You worked alone. You betcha did. The only time you were with somebody was when you were in the squad cars, to take you up and drop you off at your tower.

So when did you meet people? During lunch, or during, like before or afterward?

And going back to the guard shack and waiting for the bus to go home and that sort of thing.

But the guards seemed to keep with the guards and the workers sort of kept with the workers?

Yeah. You didn't make it with the workers. We had our own guard shacks, you know, and a lot of people didn't like the guards. We could cost you two weeks pay. And there goes *&#&(*. But you were doing your job. The only thing that made us different, we had a gun. (Laughs) Never had to use it, thank goodness.

Did you hear of anybody that had to?

No. No, I did not. No. I understand there was one little incident up there, but I don't know. It was hush-hush. Somebody cut through the fence or something. Might have been a prank, too.

Do you think the war affected the availability of housing or food in the area at all?

Oh, sure. Yeah. A plant like that, obviously, draws a lot of workers from all over. Housing was tough, because to commute from Madison to have housing, that's quite a commute.

What about availability of food during World War II?

I never had any trouble. A lot of things were rationed, but I don't think I . . . I never went hungry. Of course, I was in the service three-and-a-half years. If you call that food. (Laughs)

Were there labor shortages when you were there? Were they always looking for people, or did they seem to have enough people working there?

I think they always had enough. Up at Baraboo, seemed to always have a "help wanted" sign available up there. And of course, a lot of people just, like myself, I went up there and got work because I was waiting to go in the service and I had four or five months to wait. What are you going to do? Here's ready employment, good pay, and go up there and do it. Obviously, when I left, that had to be filled. I hope. (Laughs)

You were in San Diego at the end of the war. Do you think the presence of the plant made the war a more real event to the local citizens or not?

I think it made more aware, sure. And also they tested the powders up there. There's some hills up there, and they had a big cave dug in back there, and they had some--I don't know what caliber--105s or whatever, and they tested the powder, and every now and then the people in the community would hear this BOOM, and I'm sure that reminded them. And then you get used to it, "Well, they're just testing up in the hills," and that sort of thing. And I'm sure the constant flow of traffic and the fence all the way around it and all that sort of thing. And all the activity, obviously. And there was some service personnel in and out a lot. For a little town, a town the size of Baraboo, I suppose that made a big difference. And all those people up there, they must have had an influx on restaurants and bars and that sort of thing.

When did you come back again? After the war was over, how soon did you come back to Madison?

Nineteen-forty-six.

During that time, what kind of role did you expect the plant to play in community life? What do you think was going to happen to it?

I thought it would be closed.

Permanently?

I don't know. I think the country, at that time, in my mind, had more awareness. I don't think they were going to close everything down and just stop everything. I think they were going to ease it off and hey, if something ever comes up again, we're going to be ready. That Baraboo plant was built from scratch.

What do people presently think about the plant?

I never hear it mentioned.

Not around here at all?

No.

Do you think it should be permanently closed?

Oh, I don't know. I'm not in a position to say that. I'm a retired [inaudible]. I have no idea. I didn't know how much it was operating, but I knew it was operating. But I don't know what are the needs or the demands in the military. I have no idea. And I don't know--are there other plants in the country? That's still going. I suppose there are, but what their productivity is, I don't know. That seemed like a little safe place for a plant.

Do you remember anything about the plant safety record?

Oh, it was excellent, yeah. It seems like one time there was some kind of an explosion, but I wasn't there at the time, thank goodness. I was gone, but they were very cautious. You know, the searching, going through and all that sort of thing. And when you went through the search, you hated it. You know, "Oh, here they come again." Or it was a spot search. They could nail you anytime. Anytime you're inside that fenced [inaudible], red zone or whatever they called it, you weren't allowed any form of matches or whatever, and you were subject to search, and that was the rules. You could understand it.

Did some people complain directly to you about it?

There was always complainings. [Inaudible] was like that. You got the plant over there, maybe 500 yards away and they're making powder there, and you're at the corner of a fence line and you're searched for matches because you might do something over there. It just seems ridiculous, but it's one rule that's got to be enforced, for everybody. Whether it's the guy or the masses walks into that place.

Were there safety programs? Did they have safety meetings? Did they ever sit you down and say today we're going to talk about safety or anything like that? Do you recall?

No. When you went up there and started to work you had those things, but not ongoing unless there was a problem or something. Then you had a meeting, but not on a regular basis.

Was there a particular area of the plant that was considered more dangerous than any other area that you remember?

Oh, I guess so. There's an area that I said--I don't know whether they call it the red area or whatever--but absolutely nothing was allowed in there. I suppose that's where they mixed the powder and acid and everything. But book matches or whatever, lighters and that sort of thing, they were super strict about that. When you're out on the perimeter of the land, that's one thing. But when you're working down there with the powders, that's another thing.

Did people have to wear special clothing?

Not that I recall.

What kind of a uniform did you wear?

It looked like a highway patrol officer, [inaudible], and then there were a nicker type thing, and a coat, quarter length coat, and an over-the-shoulder strap and revolver, a holster, and a cap and a visor.

Did you ever hear about people in the community not feeling safe, either from blow ups at the plant or from the chemicals that they used there?

No, never [inaudible].

I think that's all I have. Is there anything that you can remember about working there that I didn't ask?

I thought there was a--when you get up there, I thought there was a resentment of here's a college kid up here taking this job. As it wore on and when you got to know them, then it was fine. But I think initially, you know.

Were there other students that were there?

Yeah, oh yeah.

And was there kind of a tension?

A lot of them worked in construction. No, because when they were building that place, that was awfully good money for a college kid to make. And they needed you bad.

Why do you suppose there was that kind of tension there?

I think that's normal when a guy's average age is 40, 45 or 50, and here comes a kid 18, 19 years old and making the same money he is, and "why aren't you in the service?", you know, that type of thing, a healthy kid like you.

Did that work itself out?

Oh, sure, once you got to know them.

Is there anything else that you can think of?

And I wasn't really there that long to become a veteran. I was waiting for the Marine Corps to call, and it was basically the first part of February to June that I was there; so that was all. But it was a doggone good

living. One good thing about it, when you have the midnight shift, the graveyard shift, it was great, because you made the money and then you were too tired to go out to spend it. You saved it all. Just perfect.
(Laughs)

Well, thank you very much.

You're welcome. Thank you.

(End of Interview)

DOROTHY KRUEGER
February 22, 1995
Baraboo, Wisconsin
Deborah L. Crown, Interviewer

Today is Wednesday, February 22, 1995. This is Deborah Crown and I'm interviewing Dorothy Krueger.

How long have you lived in this area?

Since I was ten years old, and I'm 84.

Where were you living when you heard that the plant was going to be built, the Badger Plant?

M-hm. On First Avenue in Baraboo.

Were you working or going to school at that time?

No, no. Heavens, going to school. I had two kids. No, on First Avenue.

But you weren't working?

No.

And you were married? How old were your children?

My daughter was 12 and Freddy's five years younger, seven.

What was the reaction of the people in the area when they heard that the plant was going to be built?

I don't think there was any bad at- . . . not that I know of. Now, I was surprised to find out what happened buying that property. I just learned how bad that was. I knew nobody wanted to sell their property, but I mean it was worse than that. But I don't think it was bad. I think it was a good reaction probably; that there was going to be industry.

Did you ever see the construction site?

Not close. You couldn't get in there.

Did a lot of people that worked on construction come from far away, or were they all from around here?

Oh, no. They came from, well, I don't know how far away, but people that worked at the plant came from [inaudible] Center and by bus. They mostly came by bus. But they came from all around, these smaller towns.

Where did these people live? Did a lot of construction workers live right at the site, or did they live in town?

No, they lived in town, rooms and stuff. Everybody that had a bedroom rented it out and so forth. And before I went to work down there, I worked some in a cafe. Like I say, I hadn't worked, but he called--I don't know. I had done some waitress work in my life. He must've known it or something, because he

called me up and I worked like from 4:00 in the afternoon until about 8:00 to take care of their coming in, you know, for supper.

Just at this cafe?

M-hm. And yeah, I don't know. Just everybody rented rooms and stuff. I didn't have any to rent. (Chuckles). That's where the construction people were.

And was this a friend of yours that owned that cafe?

I can't remember. I don't think I ever worked for him before. I say, maybe he knew I had done waitress work. I hadn't done a lot of waitress work, either. I had done some.

But he needed help because of all the . . . ?

Well, and especially in the evening, just part-time help, which was good for me because of having my kids. I didn't have to get baby sitters. My mother lived with us, and she'd be home from work and my husband then would come home. So I didn't have to hire a baby sitter.

Did the people from other towns, the construction workers from other places, did they seem to get along well with the local people, or were there some conflicts?

Oh, I don't think so. I don't think they had time to have conflicts at work. Not that I know of.

What did the construction workers do on evenings or on weekends when the plant was being built?

A lot of them went home.

The ones that were from other places, they went home?

M-hm, m-hm. Other than that, I don't have the faintest idea what they also did, I guess, before that, you know. You know, we had some Jamaican people work out there at one time.

At the plant? During production?

Yeah, ah-huh.

Do you remember anything about them?

Well, a lot of people didn't like that, but I don't know if they showed it or not. But they really didn't, and it didn't last very long for some reason. And I don't know where they stayed.

Why do you suppose people didn't like them there?

I don't have any idea. You know, there's always somebody. They could be the nicest person in the whole world, and somebody would have to--it's ever been that way. You think you've done something very nice, and here comes somebody that's going to pick at you or whatever. It's always that way. I don't even know where they worked, but they worked when I was working there; there were some. I don't know how many there were, either, a whole bunch, or how come they were there, I don't know that either.

Do you remember any people of different races that worked on construction at all?

No, see, I didn't hardly know those people.

When did you start working at the plant?

Well, I worked almost at the very start when production started. They only had one of these houses going.

Was it still being constructed? Were parts of the plant still being constructed, or was it all done?

Well, I couldn't say for sure. I think it probably was all done because I think they had to use it all. But I wouldn't know for sure.

And how did you find out about the job out there?

Oh, my goodness. Everybody knew there were a lot of jobs to be had out there, you know. And I don't know how I happened to decide to go.

You still had children, though?

Yeah. Well, the kids were no problem. They were good kids in the first place. They were not problem children, and they were 12 and seven, and they went to school. See, I had to go on shift work, but it didn't cause a problem at all. They would not have any way, at that age, I don't think--those days you could trust kids more than you can now, you know. It was a different thing than it is now, much different. I think my kids were exceptionally good kids anyway. Of course, maybe every mother would say that. I don't know. But they never, ever gave me any problem of any kind.

What was your position at the plant during World War II?

Well, I had several. I worked in [what they called] the Green Area. I started out and it was cutting powder, 30 millimeter. It would come from the press area in tubs, and there were--oh, how many--must have been at least 30, 35 of these tubs, well, like this. They were hollow, and they'd get pressed in there. They'd go round and round and round, and they'd bring them in, and you had to put them up on a rack. From there, you would put them up on a rack.

Is this nitro-cotton?

No. Well, the cotton is pressed. First, this came right to the press house that was in connection with where I was cutting the powder. They just wheeled it though a hallway. It was part of my building. But then they put these kegs, they put them in a press, and then they'd apply pressure to this and it would come out in strings. Now, the strings were about as big as a pencil led, very small. Then you'd have to take these and put them up. You had a rack that you put on this cart that came in with all these tubs in. And they were long and narrow, tall. And you'd have to put those on there. Then you'd take them, and start your machine. There were holes in this machine, in the little thing right here, all holes. It would hold all of them. And you'd cut it off, "slanch-wise" (*chuckles*) I call it--slanting--and fit them in there, and then they would run. Well, if the powder was good, it would run right through and no problem. It'd come out a lot of times barbed wire kind of, and they wouldn't run, of course. So then I worked at that as an . . .

That's the Green Area?

Yes, that's the Green Area. I was very good, because one night on the graveyard shift, big shots would walk through about once a night or once a shift, and you had to mark up every time you filled a tub. You marked

it on your machine. And they see I had done a lot, and I didn't even realize I did. The powder had been very good. And I'm a person that believes while you work, you work. When you have time off, then you rest. I mean a lot of people, I think, spend more time not working and figuring out how to not work than they do if they'd work, you know. But anyway, oh, they got all excited. This is probably 6:00 in the morning. We worked till 8:00. And they kept pushing the powder to me, and of course, dumb me . . . the only thing you have to do when you have a job like that is to try to do better than you did the day before or something. You have to have a challenge, I think, to work for. That's the way I feel about it. But anyway. So Dorothy Krueger had run more powder than anybody else had ever run.

The union was very, very new there. Then it started out why couldn't everybody else all over the plant, in this cutting business? Dorothy Krueger could cut all this powder; how come nobody else can do it? And I thought boy, were you a big nut. Why did you ever do that? Well, I never dreamed what I was setting up. And it really got to be quite a thing. And I was really mad at myself. But, you know, that's the way I feel. I mean I like to challenge myself, I guess, or something. It's so boring to work on jobs like that, you know. But, get, 87 cents an hour. I don't know what they were paying, but that was better than you could get anyplace else.

The plant paid better than anywhere else?

Oh, yeah. I can't remember what the . . . but anyway, then, I was talking with my -- one of the supervisors [inaudible]. I wasn't busy at that . . . I was talking with him. I said, "You know, I think that the girls that are cutting here, when we're not busy, you should let us go in where they're pressing it so we know how come it is when it's bad. I think we should learn that, know about that." Well, he says, "That's a damn good idea. Yeah." So then I went in, I learned how to do that. So then, every once in a while, they'd be short, and they'd put me in there, and I liked that, having something different to do. Well, then it wasn't too long until--this was about year. I worked in there a good nine months straight. Then they began to show me other things. I think the girl in the DPA, that's a place where they mix the ether and alcohol and DPA -- it's a yellow crystal-like powder, not powder, but like salt, yellow or dark yellow. And you dump so many bags of that in the mix and then you turn on this and you have to weigh it. You're weighing it. And then you turn it off, and it mixes in; I think for an hour it was. Then you take a sample over to the lab. That's where Verna worked. And if it was okay, then you could use it. Open it up and let them draw off of that. If it wasn't, then they told you what you should do with it to repair it, and then you had to take another sample over. And this is in a little building all by itself, with two big, big, big tanks here. And this lady hadn't had a vacation. And in a year's time she had to have a vacation. So they taught that to me. Well, then I learned everything in this particular area. I worked with the men in the mix house. And that's where you would draw this fluid over that I had mixed in this DPA. They put the cotton, come from the [inaudible], where they pressed this cotton that came from the--I don't know what the name of that was--but they came and they made cakes out of it. When it came into the Green Area, it was in big, big, big tubs, big tubs, and they came in overhead here, and you dumped them into this press. And I learned that, too; how to press them into cakes that looked like cheese. And that's what came--they took those from there in--it almost looked like coffins on wheels--up to the mix house. And then they mix it with the solvent that I made over in the, or whoever, Sarah, made in the DPA. And that's what then they took. They mixed it there. Then where'd it go? Where'd it go from there? Must've gone out of the area.

But that was all in the same area?

Yeah, this was all--there were a good five jobs in that one area. But they had different--ours was, I think, the Green Area, but the one that came before it was where they made the cotton.

About how many people just worked in that area?

Oh, Lord. I don't know. See, it had different areas just like this. They called them lines. I think they were A, B, C, and D Lines. I was hired into the very first one that operated. Then there were at least three, if not four--they're all kind of next to each other. There were I would say about four of those going, and I didn't know much about what went on after that. Well, then a job came up. They had the Ether Still House, it was called. There were three of those. Notice when you go down the hill, there are three tall, tall, tall buildings there. Two of them are kind of together and one is over here. And they had chutes on them, tin chutes. Well, there's three floors there.

Those are for fire escapes?

Yes. If you were on the top floor. And the union is going pretty good now, and this job became available, and there was another girl I knew had applied, but she had--I didn't know this for a fact, but it was a pretty good rumor around--she was running around with one of the supervisors or whatever he was. So I thought, "I haven't got a ghost of a chance, and besides that, I was the only girl that could do all the jobs in this area." Now, there were some others that could do one job or something like this, but I knew any of them in this area. So I thought, "They'll never let me go. I might as well not apply." But then I thought, "Well, if I don't apply, I sure won't have a chance." And it was ten cents more an hour. I think it was 11 cents more an hour or something like that. And besides that, you didn't have to work very hard, at all hardly. And my God, I got it. I couldn't believe it. So there. That was nice. You just sat most of the time. You could wash your hair and set it, we crocheted. Because all you had to do was read, you read if everything was running good. There was nothing to it. And I was the helper. There was two girls in each--I don't think they ever ran all three at once--two houses. And there you had to wash your tanks outside. You knew how long it would take them to fill from empty. First you did when you got out there, you'd go out and measure the tanks that were being used, and you wrote that down. And then you'd have to, if you were running the house, the girl got probably a dime more than I did. She was over me. And I had to go up and down stairs. Now, I'm telling you, from one floor to another--I had them counted--at least 30, at least. They're just tall. See they have to hold all these tanks and stuff. And so each hour you were supposed to go and take the measurements on whatever was operating. Well, pretty soon you know darn well if everything is operating well. You know what the reading is going to be. It's when you're having trouble that you're in trouble. Or when you're opening up and shutting down, like weekends when we did that weekends. And it was up, down, up down. Other than that, it was a very nice job to have.

Why did you want to work at the plant to begin with?

For the money.

Was there any part of your job that was dangerous? Any one of your jobs?

Not any one more than any other. I supposed there's a certain amount of danger to any. I hurt myself over in--I worked in rocket powder. And there, myself and another girl . . . they were trying out it seems like it was TR3, this new mix of powder, and they had big rollers that the girl comes and dumps on these rollers. And it's supposed to roll it around until makes a sheet. It's just powder, black, pretty black. [Inaudible] little [inaudible] in it. And it rolls in there, and then you have to keep putting it on until it sticks, it hangs on to the rollers. As I remember, they're about this big, two of them. And then when it hangs onto one roller, then you cut it off and it goes right through, then, to another room. So anyway, they put me and this other girl on this new powder to run this, to try to get it to work, I guess. And it wouldn't stick, and it wouldn't stick, and it wouldn't stick, and we found out that if you put water on, if you washed the rollers, it would stick better. So here you are with a rag and you go and you wash them, and the rag caught--and you wear gloves there, because if you don't, that powder--well, you don't have to wear gloves, but it keeps it from, the nitroglycerin goes right through your skin and you get one powerful headache, which everybody

got for about a week or so and then you become accustomed to it or whatever, I guess. So you wouldn't get headaches. But anyway, it caught and I couldn't figure out. It was something up here that shut the machine down and something you stepped on. Well, we never use them when you step on the . . . well, you hardly ever did. You hardly ever shut the machine off, while you were there working, hardly ever. But you knew they were there. And I caught my glove. And here I'm trying to grab my hand, trying to hold my hand--well, my whole arm would have gone in if I hadn't have done that. And I thought for quite a while, maybe a year or so afterwards, I thought, "Why in the world didn't you shut the darn machine off with your foot?" I didn't want to take my hand off to reach up here. See, because then it would have dragged my hand in. And I thought, "Well, why didn't I do that? That was so stupid that I didn't," but because I'd never used that, I supposed, see. And I would not let go and I'm screaming and hollering and yelling. Well, see that, it deformed. And it took here, it took a big chunk here.

Off your thumb?

Yeah. Well, you can see. This is a skin graft. That's all graft. So it was way down here, and I guess these weren't hurt. But this had crippled a little bit. This is arthritis in this one. They had to graft skin on there, and when they grafted, they didn't get enough layers of skin. They grafted from up here. You can see where the scar is, and why he did that. If I'd have been a younger woman, I wouldn't have wanted a scar up here. It's not a terrible scar. But anyway, you know, on your leg or something would have been better, but he did this. But he didn't get enough. I don't supposed he'd ever done a skin graft, probably, this doctor that I had.

Was that right after your thumb was injured that they grafted skin on there?

Pretty soon, pretty soon.

Did they take you to the hospital, then, right away?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. My goodness. They wouldn't let you lose a day. I had to go to work every day.

You didn't miss a day?

No. Oh, they didn't want you to. They didn't want you to have a . . . on the insurance and stuff, see. It would up the insurance if they had a lot of that stuff. So I went and sat in the office. And then finally, and of course, I'd be on shifts, and the office girl wouldn't be there on shifts, so then I got to doing some office work, helping . . . Well, gee, it's very boring to sit there, you know. About drove me nuts. I'd go out and visit the people on the line and stuff, but it was . . .

This is when you were injured?

Yeah. Well, my hand was all bandaged.

Did they ask you to come every day still?

Yeah. Oh. This happened on a Saturday, and when I was in the room, in the emergency room at the hospital, couple of big shots from the plant came, and then they said to me something about Monday, they'd see me Monday at work. And the doctor says, "What do you mean? This girl's not going to go to--she can't work." "No, no, no, no," they said. "She won't be working. She just comes to the office. But we don't want time lost." It was for insurance.

They just paid you to come, rather than have that on their insurance?

M-hm. And they did that with, I guess, everybody else, if they could possibly come, that was injured. I don't know how much injury they had. If I ever did know, I've forgotten.

Were there a lot of accidents at the plant?

I don't think a lot, huh-uh.

Do you remember any?

No, I don't remember any, other than my own. I'm sure there were, out . . .

What was an average day like? Like what time did you usually get there and how did you get into the plant, and what did you do for lunch, things like that?

Well, you had to get a ride to get down there. You either drove yourself or car pools.

How did you get there?

Mostly car pool. I drove a little bit myself, but I had to, when I was with the union and that, I had to--I was secretary to the union, then, and I would have to drive. I always had a ride that picked me up.

Did you work there also during Korea and during Vietnam?

No. Didn't run. Did it? I don't think it ran, then.

Yeah, it did, actually. I've talked to some people that were there, then. But you were just there . . .

Well, there have been people there all the time, but I don't think that they made powder down there, did they?

Yeah, actually they did. So you just worked during World War II, then?

Yeah. In the Green Area and in rocket, until they shut down.

Did most people car pool?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Some I suppose drove themselves, but it makes sense to car pool. Well, then when you got there--we got there and went right in. We went right in and punched in. Because a lot of people would come a half-an-hour early and go--they had a place where you could buy candy bars, I think they had sandwiches you could buy there and a lot of benches and stuff. For cigarette smoke, you could hardly see, when you got in there. Because they would have their last cigarettes and stuff.

Because they couldn't smoke in the plant?

Oh, no. My goodness, no. And you went through the time clock, then you went to your change house. Well, you had to wear white--this had to be your inflammable, what . . . ?

Non-flammable.

Yes, yes . . . dunked in something to make it so it wouldn't . . . I think sometimes some of them may be-- I'm faintly remembering now--like the cutting machines might catch on fire. I don't know. They had some accidents, I recall, in the press, in rocket, I think. I think they had a couple fires. But I don't think anybody was badly injured. But anyway, you changed your clothes and then you went and you sat in the bus, and then they took you to your job.

Oh, you had a bus from the changing house to your job?

Yeah. Oh, yeah. My gosh, yes. There's a lot of stuff before you get--we were out quite far.

Where did you get those special clothes?

They furnished them.

Did you have to take them home and wash them?

No. Oh, no. Because they had to be flame retarded or whatever. I can't remember where we picked them up. I think you perhaps had to pay for them. I don't remember that for sure. But you had a hood, too, that you had to wear, a white hood that tucked down into your . . .

Did you ever wear any special glasses?

Uh-uh.

But you had glasses, though, you said:

That was in the rocket area. No, you didn't in the Green Area. That was to keep you from having headaches.

What about did you wear any special shoes?

Yes. Yes, they had the steel toe. Horrid lookingest thing you ever saw, you know, but yeah.

Do you remember a lot of women working there during World War II?

Oh, my goodness yes. People would come from--take them an hour to get here. Well, [inaudible] Center, that's a good hour's drive from here, and there were quite a few worked here from [inaudible] Center. I figure that the women, I used to think, they'd eat breakfast home and probably, because they had to be here at 8:00, so they probably got their kids pretty well--well, they'd have to leave at 7:00. And I imagine when they got home, they had dishes setting on the table from breakfast. I didn't think I could put up with that. My kids were old enough so that I didn't run into that. See, I was gone all three shifts. So they had to get their own . . . well, their dad was home there with them.

All three shifts?

Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. When you worked on the line, you worked three shifts.

Oh, you'd work one shift for awhile and then another?

Yeah.

What were those?

Eight to 4:00, 4:00 to 12:00 and 12:00 to 8:00.

You mentioned 12:00 to 8:00. That was called the graveyard shift?

M-hm.

Do the other ones have names? Were they called anything?

Well, they day shift and then--yes, they did have a name for that, but I can't think what it was.

Verna said "swing."

Yeah, I think that was it.

What did you do for lunch? Was there a cafeteria?

No, you could buy a sandwich to take from this place I told you could go before coming in. No, you brought your lunch.

Where was that place located?

Outside. You can see it. Or could. I don't know if it's still there or not. But it's close to the parking area, and I guess they've even dug up some of the pavement there, but the first building to the parking area, there was a lot of--5,000 people worked there at one time, or 7,000 wasn't it? So those cars were all . . . You know, they had a cafeteria at one time, but the people that worked inside there could not use it. You couldn't. They'd of had to bus you out. That was just for the big mucky-mucks, you know.

So you brought your lunch. Where did you eat? Right there by the line?

Well, wherever you could find to eat. There was no dining rooms or anything. You could go out and sit someplace and eat in the ether.

So all you had for lunch was how long?

I can't remember.

Did you have any breaks during the day?

Yeah. I think you had a ten minute break, morning and afternoon.

You said there were a lot of women that worked there. Did a lot of them have children?

Oh, yeah.

Was there day care at the plant?

Hm-m.

What did they do with their children?

I don't really know. Because I didn't know them that well. If you didn't know them to start with, you didn't really have a lot of time to get very well acquainted with people. I did one little girl, but I don't know what she did with her children. I think some relative, maybe her mother or somebody, but you didn't get acquainted with a lot of people or really know that much about them. Because you just didn't have that much--you were working at your job here. Now, in the press house, you could have, or in [inaudible] you would get very well acquainted with your partner. Two of you worked in a room. But at my job, your machines made so much noise, you couldn't talk. Anybody that talked to you had to come up right beside you and talk to you. You couldn't talk to the guy at the machine next to you at all.

Because it was loud?

Yeah. It was just like working alone all day.

Were there certain jobs that only men did?

M-hm.

What kinds were those?

At first, they pushed all the carts from one place to another, where this stuff had to go, in the Green Area.

The men did?

Yeah. Well, then some women did some of that. They did. But like in the Mix House--they called it the Mix House--I've never seen any women. The men got up on a platform to open the thing up, and I never saw any women in there.

Were there some jobs that only women did?

Yeah, cutting powder, [inaudible].

Do you remember any people that worked there that were of different races, people that worked there? You mentioned the Jamaican people before. Were there any other?

I didn't ever see a Black person. Well, Jamaicans, I guess, are Black aren't they? But we don't have hardly any Black people here. This was when the plant was over with. My son was in the army, and he wrote me that there was a Colored man that was coming to be a big shot at the plant. This was after it was shut down. And he wondered if I would be willing to help them find some housing. I said sure. And they came. Lovely couple, just lovely. And I said, "You know, I'm going to tell you exactly how I feel about this." I said, "If I were you, I don't think you can find anything in Baraboo anyway, because the housing, since the plant,"--since the plant, it was shut down. I'm quite sure it was shut down. And I said, "We don't have hardly any Black people here, very, very few." I said, "You could live next to me and I'd love you as much as I do any neighbor, because I'm that kind of person," but I said, "You know that there are two words a lot of people that wouldn't want to have anything to do with your folks because you're Black." And I said, "If I were you," and I said, "you have small children, they're going to go to school, I have no idea, because," I said, "I don't know if we've even got one Black child in school. I don't know, but very, very few if we do." And I said, "If I were you, I would go to Madison. The drive is a little bit further," but I said, "I think you'd be a lot happier there."

That was after the plant was closed?

M-hm. M-hm. They've had people work out there. And I thought I'm just going to tell them really how I feel. Now, I could have accepted them. Colored don't make any--as long as they are nice people, it don't make any difference to me. I would hate to have my kids marry a Colored person, because it's bound to cause problems. But I would have accepted them in the family. But I mean it's better if they wouldn't. And I kind of hate to think that eventually, if we do have these marriages, and we're having a lot of them, pretty soon we're not going to be White anymore. We're going to be . . . and I hate to see that. But there's an awful lot of nice Colored people. Well, we really only know about the bad ones, I guess, you know, which is true of our own kids.

But you don't remember many during World War II?

Oh, no. No. Very few.

Did a lot of people save their money or spend a lot of money during World War II?

Gosh, I don't really know. I paid for a house, bought a house.

During the war?

Yeah, well, we were renting and I had an awful good thing going with this guy. I didn't know him at all until he came across the street. I went up to him and asked him what he was going to do with his house. It was across the street from where we were living. We were renting. And I went up and asked him, "What do you want to do with that house?" And he said, "Sell it." But he said, "If you want to rent it, I'll rent it to you." Well, he said that the gal . . . her folks owned it and he knew her. She worked in the court house. And he was a realtor, and he knew her. And he said, "I've heard what wonderful tenants you are," and so he said, "I will rent it to you. Otherwise, I will fix it up and sell it." And I said, "Well, kind of rent?" I think we were paying \$18 a month. And he said, "I'll come down, take you over, and we'll see what needs to be--some things need to be done." So we went over and he put new floor and finished this floor and blah, blah, blah, and he said, "Do you want a bare floor and varnished or do you want linoleum?" Well, I didn't want the bare floor. Now, I might have changed my mind. But then, I didn't know of anybody that had one. The paint on the outside--I think the house was about 100 years old--peeled, and he was going to paint it. So the guy worked there all one morning, and I thought, "Well, this is pretty silly. It's going to take him a long time." They had just started shingling houses. Asbestos shingles were the first. So I called him up and I said, "You know, it's going to take him a long time to get this in shape to have it look like anything, because there's a lot of [inaudible] out paint out there." I said, "Have you thought of shingling it?" "My God, no." He says, "I never gave that a thought." He says, "I'll look into it." Well, he did it, and hired a guy that I knew very well. So I called him up and I said, "Well, I'll do the painting while he's got the scaffolding up. I'll paint around the windows." So I did that, and he appreciated all this stuff I was doing. The painting in the house when we moved, the woodwork and stuff, I did all of that, and did anything. Papering, I did that. And he really appreciated it. So when he went to sell it, when I went up and asked him about buying it, I said, "Would he sell it?" And he said, "Well, no." He said, "I'm certainly not interested as long as you live there." But he said, "I just turned your neighbor up the street--they were asking about it." And he said, "I wouldn't sell it to them." But he said, "If you're wanting to buy it, you'll be buying something else; and then I would sell it. So I'll sell it to you." I thought that was really nice that he showed that he appreciated what I had done. And he dragged out the receipts and stuff and all I paid was what he put in the house. Taxes and stuff like that. Material. He didn't make a dime on it, according to what I could see, anyway.

(end of side 1; beginning of side 2)

Today is Wednesday, February 22, 1995. This is Deborah Crown, speaking with Dorothy Krueger, and this is side 2.

How did your job at the plant end? Do you remember when the war was over?

Oh, sure. They shut the plant down.

Did it end just immediately?

How soon after the war was over, I don't remember that.

What was that like? Did somebody tell you that you were going to be laid off or did you quit?

No, you were laid off. You drew a compensation. I think I had about four or five checks that I got. You got what part of the week that you [inaudible] and you were saving for a bond. I can't remember, because there were several checks, because I paid for my house off with that.

Was your job union or non-union?

Oh, union. I was the secretary to the union. I got fired once. I was, of course, also a steward, and I got in trouble quite a few times.

With what?

With the people I worked with. Not the people I worked with, but the supervision. Because I would interfere if they'd--tell them off or whatever you'd call it--if they were doing something that the union wouldn't put up with.

Were there ever any labor disputes?

In particular, I don't think so. I don't remember.

Do you remember anybody in the community that disliked the plant because it made munitions, because it made powder?

At the time, no, because I think it was very necessary. They hated to lose that wonderful land down there and that. But no, it had to go someplace. And it certainly did good for Merrimac and Portage and Baraboo and having people around and buying and so forth.

What was the availability of housing like?

Don't mention it. Don't mention it. Housing has been hard to get ever since. It hasn't been, of course, like it was. And they've done a lot of building. It's enlarged. Not because of that, but we were in that state and we never seemed to really get out of it. That's my impression.

So it was difficult to find a place to live during the war, then?

Oh, my. It was impossible.

Did the government set up any temporary housing?

Oh, sure. They had that at Badger Village, across the street.

And do you know what was there, what they had there?

Little apartments. Verie, my sister, lived there, and Verna lived over there. Did she tell you about it?

Yeah.

It was very satisfactory I think. They had a school there.

Do you remember any promotions to encourage people to support the war effort, at the plant?

Hm-m.

Like things to encourage, morale boosting things?

Hm-m.

You mentioned bonds earlier. What was that?

Well, you had a bond taken out, so much each week. And then you'd get the bond.

Taken out of your check?

Yeah, m-hm.

Did they encourage you a lot to participate in that, or was that up to you?

No. I don't remember how they approached it, but I think everyone probably did that.

Everyone?

I think so. I would think so.

What about how did the war affect the availability of food in this area? Or did it affect it?

I don't think it was any different.

Do you remember any changes in people's values or morals during the war at all, or do you think it just sort stayed about the same?

I wouldn't say one way or the other, because I don't remember. I'm sure it must have affected some things, but I can't really say what it was.

Was this your first time ever to work for a big company?

Yes.

And what was that like?

Well, I didn't like my job. I don't like any job that you don't have to use your mind a little bit for and stuff, you know. I don't know how people put up with that day after day. Like me, like I say, I'd try to make more powder than I'd ever made before or something. You almost have to do something, but when

I got to where I didn't . . . then I liked it. Got shifted around, didn't know what I was going to do, and the ether still house, that was nice.

Do you think that this was the first time a lot of the women that worked there had ever worked outside the home?

Oh my, yes. A lot of farm women came in. Lot of farm women. Never done anything but helped with the farm. Their kids were old enough so they were going to school and could take care of themselves, and working on the shift work, I don't know if somebody came in and helped with their milking or whatever, but a lot of that.

Do you think a lot of those women wanted to stay working after the war was over?

I wouldn't be surprised, because you get used to that income. It wouldn't surprise me at all.

Did you want to keep working?

Well, when they quit,--I got a divorce while I was working out there and got remarried. I think I was glad to--and my husband didn't want me to work anyway.

So you didn't work after that, then?

No, no. Nothing. I think that was about the end of my work for me, ah-huh.

Is there anything that you can think of that I haven't asked about that you remember about working out there?

Hm-m.

Okay. Well, then I thank you very much.

Verna said that you had information on when they bought the land.

Yeah, Scott has a bunch of that information.

I didn't know that.

(End of Interview)

HOWARD RITTMAN
February 16, 1995
Portage, Wisconsin
Deborah L. Crown, Interviewer

Today is Thursday, February 17, 1995. This is Deborah Crown interviewing Howard Rittman, and this is Side 1.

How long have you lived in this area?

We have lived in this house right here since 1952. But I came to this area in 1927 from Milwaukee.

Where were you living when you heard the plant was going to be built?

Right here in Portage.

Were you working or going to school?

I was working--I think I was working in a filling station at the time.

About how much were you getting paid?

You mean at the plant?

At the filling station?

Oh, let's see. Probably three dollars a day.

What was the reaction of most people in the area when they heard that the government was taking that land out there for the plant?

Well, I think at first it was due to the fact that it was such good land that a lot of the people, especially closer to Baraboo, were kind of against it because of the good crops that they raised there and the number of farms that it was going to take in.

Did their feelings change later? Were they more accepting of it later or not?

I don't think so. Not for quite some time.

Did anyone in your family own land out there that was going to be purchased?

No, no. I know I went to some of the auctions that the farms had there.

And what were those like?

Well, a lot of people came to the auctions. In fact, I think I told you I was working in a filling station, but at the time, I was living in (*Briggsville?*) on a small little farm, and I know I just recall now that I bought some sheep at the auction over there.

Were most people paid enough for their land that they could buy comparable land somewhere else?

Oh, I think so. I think the government gave them--at that time, it was probably pretty good money. I don't recall what it was.

Did you work there during the construction of the plant?

Yes, I did.

And what was it that you did there?

Common labor.

And which shift did you work?

I worked I think it was 4:00 to 12:00.

Four in the afternoon to 12:00 midnight?

M-hm. And our rate of pay was 75 cents an hour.

Was that good?

It was excellent. *(Laughs)* And then after a short time, I think after a month or two, we got a raise to 85 cents an hour. And carpenters at that time were making a dollar and a quarter an hour. *(Laughs)*.

Why did you go to work there to work on the construction?

Well, it was good money at that time, and I just thought it'd be something different. *(Chuckles)*.

What was a typical day like?

Well, it was we'd get there in the early afternoon, of course, and we'd be taken out by bus to a location. I remember we went out to the--it was a great big hole. I can't remember what the place was, but I know different nights the boss would tell us now go hide behind those lumber piles he said. We don't want people just standing around doing nothing, he said. Go hide. So there was a lot of wasted time, which was government.

How did you work at night?

Oh, they had big generators going and they had lights, portable generators.

What were the conditions like at the construction site?

Well, if it was rainy and nasty, *(chuckles)* it was very muddy, and the roads weren't constructed or anything. They were just graveled paths you might say. But it wasn't too bad. And of course there was a lot of construction going on all over. It wasn't just one location. There'd be where they were building buildings all over the place.

About how many people were working on construction do you think?

Well, I don't know exactly. Probably a couple thousand I would say.

Did most of the construction workers live in the towns or did they live right there by the . . . ?

No, they lived in towns in the surrounding area, an area I'd say of probably 50 miles, all around.

Were most of the construction workers local people or did most of them come from somewhere else?

Well, there were a lot of local people and then I think it drew a lot of people from Milwaukee and different towns, Madison, larger towns, too, I think.

How did the construction workers get along? Like the local people and the non-local people? Do you remember any conflicts there?

No, I don't. I think everybody got along real well. I think everybody (*chuckles*) was glad to earn that type of money, really so everybody seemed pretty well satisfied.

What did construction employees do on the evenings and on the weekends?

Well, I don't know.

What did you guys do?

Well, I don't know as I did (*laughs*) anything out of the ordinary. Maybe went to a dance or something. Nothing special. Card parties maybe.

What kind of cards games did you play?

What kind did we play? Oh, [*inaudible*] and 500.

*Do you think that the construction workers that came in from other places took work away from local people, or did they need everybody that [*inaudible*]?*

I think they needed every- . . . , because dues to the war, they needed everybody they could get.

Did the area change a lot, this whole area, change a lot during the construction period or not?

Well, I don't think there was a great change. Baraboo, I think, had the biggest change.

As far as?

Building. Because I remember that they built these homes, a bunch of homes there, for construction workers or people that moved in to Baraboo.

How did you first find out about getting a job at the plant, once it was built and you were done working on construction?

Well, I went and applied for a job because I was kind of interested in working there. At that time, why it was real good money, so that's why I went there.

Before you started your job, what did you think that working at the plant would be like?

I didn't have any idea. *(Laughs)*. I had an interview with some chemists, and I had always liked chemistry in high school and I liked physics, and so that's how I got into the lab. I didn't have a college education, just high school. And so I liked chemistry and physics and that's how I got hired. *(Chuckles)*.

What did you think was done at the plant before you went to work there?

Well, I knew what they were doing. I knew they were going to produce powder.

Why exactly did you want to work there?

Well, I thought at least--I wasn't able to get into service because of physical disability; so I thought at least I would be doing something worthwhile for the war effort.

Was there more than one reason why you wanted to work there?

Well, and like I said before, the money, and the working conditions.

In which building or area at Badger did you work?

I worked in the laboratory.

And what did you do there?

Well, I was a lab technician, and did the chemical analysis on acid, and I also, as time went on, I learned to make up the solutions and that, and I also did some glass blowing for the lab.

What kind of test would you do on the acid?

Well, we ran a--it's quite a while ago. *(Laughs)* Well, we ran analysis for nitric acid, mononitric acid and monosulphuric acid, different tests for that.

And what were those tests for?

They were to determine the amount of--the acid was used in making the nitro-cotton, and the tests were used in determining how much nitric acid and how much sulphuric acid went into a mix for the nitro-cotton.

Can you describe an average day? How did you get there?

Well, most of the time I rode in a car pool, and there was usually five or six of us in the car, and we'd get there at about 7:30. I worked days then all the time. And we'd get there around 7:30 and we had to be to work at I think it was ten to 8:00. And then we would go in through the clock alley and then I would walk out to the lab, because it was matter of maybe a half-a-mile at the most.

What would you do going through the clock alley? What's that?

That was where you clocked in, where you punched your time card, and then you walk out to your job, out to the lab. I would walk out there, and then the day would just go on and you'd be testing acid.

Was there a cafeteria for lunch?

No, you'd have to take--there was a cafeteria, but it was not open for people in the area. It was more for the administration people, outside of the area.

Where did you go for lunch? Did you stay in the lab?

Yeah, we had a lunch room and we would eat in the lab, take our own lunch and eat in the lab.

How long did you have for lunch?

Half hour.

Did you have any other breaks during the day?

No, not really. I don't recall.

If you got your work done early, could you leave early?

No, no, no. You'd have to stay. I think we clocked out at 3:57. (Chuckles).

So your was the--what did they call that?

It was the day shift.

And then what were the other ones?

The 4:00 to 12:00 and the 12:00 to 8:00.

Did those have names, too?

Just the 4:00 to 12:00 shift and the midnight shift.

How did your job fit into the overall production of the powder?

Well, we were in the very beginning. The acid lab and the acid area was in the very beginning of the powder making.

Was your job, during World War II, union or non-union?

Non-union. Well, wait now.

Did you work there later, too?

Did I work later?

Did you work during Korea and during . . . ?

I worked all three operations.

Was it union or non-union then?

I believe after we'd been there a while, it was the union, but then after that we never had union, as far as the lab was concerned. Lab people were separate. We were kind of considered--oh, I don't know what you'd call it--kind of like the administration people would be.

Do you remember any labor disputes at all?

Yeah, I remember there was a strike at one time.

When was that?

I don't recall.

Was that during World War II, or was it later?

I don't even remember that.

Do you remember a strike?

Yeah.

And who did that involved?

I think it involved the whole plant. I can't recall exactly, but I remember there was a strike at one time.

Do you remember why?

No, I don't.

What were the working conditions like?

Well, our working conditions, in the lab, were very good. It was very nice working conditions, and of course, there were male and female together. I mean we all worked together, and we had real nice supervisors and chemists and didn't have any problems ever it didn't seem like.

Was this your first time to do this kind of work?

M-hm.

What did you think about that?

Well, I enjoyed it very much. I really liked it because it was the type of thing that I was interested most in school, and I really enjoyed working there. I must have, because I went back for three times. I put in 23 years all together.

Was this the first time that you'd ever worked from a big company?

Yes, m-hm.

And what was that like, working for a big company?

Well, it didn't seem any different than any other time.

Was the work stressful or not?

No, I wouldn't say so.

Did you have any pressure to work quickly or not?

Well, yes. You had to run these tests and we had a certain amount of time, because if we didn't get our tests done, we would hold up the nitrating houses, where the acid was mixed with the nitro-cotton, and that would shut down that whole line, then. So we had to get our tests done within a short a time as we possibly could. Sometimes, we ran into trouble because the acid didn't get mixed right, when they were mixing it. So we ran into trouble and then we would hold up the line.

Until what? It was held up until . . . ?

Well, until we could get the acid the way they expected it to be to make the nitro-cotton.

What do you think about your part in the defense effort, during World War II?

Well, I felt like I was doing my part. As long as I couldn't be in service, well I thought at least I was helping.

What do you think of the plant's role in the defense effort? Do you think it was important?

Oh, very much so. Very much so. In fact, I recall at one time, during war time, when there was 10,000 people worked at the Badger Ordnance, and they would bring them in from Madison by trainloads of people. And they had a special spur that brought people in from--whole trainloads of people.

What kinds of people worked at the plant, as far as men and women? Would you say there were more women than men or more men than women?

Well, I don't know. I would say it'd almost be 50-50. It might not have been, but it just seemed like there was about an even number of each.

What about people of different races?

Well, there were different races of people there. There were Blacks and Indians, and I don't know of others, but I know there were--well, I shouldn't say that, because in our lab, we had people from India and different countries. I don't think there was any certain class of people. I mean there wasn't a lot of them, but I would say there was more White people then the others, but there was a mixture.

Do you recall if the plant provided day care facilities for women with children or not?

I don't believe so. I don't believe so.

Did you know what they did with their children during the day?

No, I don't. (Chuckles).

Was there a plant newspaper or a company newspaper?

Yeah, there was a plant newspaper.

What kind of articles did it contain?

Well, it contained articles on things that were going on and improvements in the plant. In fact, I still get the paper. It's just a general newspaper of the plant, people that worked there and if there were any accidents, they would report them in there and so forth.

Was the plant segregated at all?

In what way do you mean?

In having only certain jobs that men did and only certain jobs that women did?

Well, I think kind of, yes . . . in places. In places.

What kind of jobs did only men do?

Well, as I recall, toward the end, there was more, but at the beginning, I think in the nitrating house, because that was kind of a dangerous place, where they mixed the nitro-cotton and the acid. Because a lot of times, there were fires in there; not as you would really say there's a fire, but this nitro-cotton would catch on fire in these big containers that they mixed the cotton and the nitro-cotton, and the fumes, yellow fumes, would just fill the place, and they'd have to get out of there. And it wasn't really fit for a woman to be in a place like that. I think that's why. Although, I think in the last probably the later years, after say the third operation, I believe there were a few women that worked in there. But it was hard work.

Would you say that was the most dangerous area of the plant?

One of the most dangerous.

Were there any jobs that only members of a certain race did?

No, I don't think so.

Do you remember any morale boosting efforts, like promotions about why we're fighting this war?

Oh, yeah. We'd have safety meetings and that would be brought up at those safety meetings and that. I know, I remember. And of course had bulletins all over the plant telling to stick to your job or whatever, you know, help the boys overseas or something like that. There was a lot of posters.

Do you remember if the plant ever received any Army/Navy E Awards?

Awards? Oh, yes. Many. Because we, lots of times, went with a good many hours without any accidents and they would receive awards for that.

Did your ideas about working at the plant change over time or not?

No, I enjoyed it every time I went back. In fact, the second time I was called back and the third time I was called back, because I was called back to set up the laboratory both times. So I really enjoyed it.

When did your job end after World War II, like around 1945 or '46?

Well, I was one of the last ones in our department to leave, because--I don't know just when it was, but I know I was one of the last ones, because we had to put all the lab things into standby and pack them away, the balances and all of that. So probably . . . I don't know whether it was '45 or '46.

You said the plant was put on standby after World War II, then?

M-hm. M-hm.

Do you remember when that was?

No, I don't. (Chuckles).

What was that like?

Well, a lot of people were laid off, but there was still a lot of people that had work to do like we did in the lab, putting stuff away and packing it and putting it in standby condition. That's what they called it. And a lot of the things, of course, had to be cleaned and thoroughly checked because of the nature of the--well, for instance, the nitro-cotton, I mean you couldn't be let without being cleaned out thoroughly because it could catch fire.

So what have they done in the years since World War II there?

Well, they've done a lot of building and lots of improvements.

What kinds of improvements?

Well, I know they've built a new acid area. In fact, just I think last year or so, they redone it again, and they improved the water disposal, the water disposal plant. I think there are a lot of other improvements, which I don't know of.

How was the pay at the plant, during World War II?

It was good.

How about compared to the other jobs around?

It was more. I know when I started out, I started out at \$325 a month in the lab, which was good pay.

Was the pay the same for everyone?

Oh, no. No. See the people in the lab were on monthly pay and the people out in the area were on hourly.

Did men and women make the same amount of money if they were working on the same job?

I think so.

And minorities, too?

M-hm.

Did many or most people save their money, during World War II, or did they spend a lot of money, during World War II?

Well, I know I saved. Because we bought War Bonds, and I think a lot of people did that, because it was pretty good money and you didn't need all that you earned to live on. Like myself, I bought this home--we bought this in '52, but through that, I bought my home. And I think a lot of people did that, rather than

renting. That is people who worked there that lived here locally. I think they invested money and saved money or else invested in property.

How were people getting along during the war?

In what way?

Well, there were a lot more people here because of the plant.

Yeah.

Was that a problem? Was it too crowded for people?

No, I don't think so. Everybody seemed to--see most of the people were working shifts, so actually there wasn't too many more people because there'd be people gone during the day and during the evening and during the late hours. So really there was no overcrowding, really. And there was things going on I recall. Well, they had entertainment and stuff for people on the day shift and the other shifts, too. And they graveyard shift people, they could have entertainment like when they come home in the morning, things they could do.

Do you remember what things they would do?

Well, no I don't recall exactly, but I know there were different things that they could do.

Was it stuff that was planned by the plant?

Some of it was, yeah.

Were there any problems between the newcomers and the people who had lived here a long time, as far as did they mix, did they [inaudible]?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, I think so.

Did people gamble?

I don't think so at that time. Not like they do now. *(Laughs)*.

By how much did the general population increase do you think?

I don't have any idea.

Was there any temporary housing set up for newcomers?

Well, there was that Badger Village that was across the road from Badger Army Ammunition Plant there. And they had a school there and store, drug store, just like a little city by itself.

Were there any other housing arrangements that had to be made?

I think that was the only one. Well, Baraboo might have had some housing.

Did you know anybody that lived in Badger Village?

No, not really.

Do you know anything really that you could share about that place, that you could tell about Badger Village?

No. Well, I do know, like I said, they had different entertainment and stuff there. I don't know whether they used the school as a community building or not, but they had entertainment and things that they could do there. A lot of young people lived there with families.

Do you think there was a higher incidence of illness, during the war, because of a larger number of people in the area, or not?

No, I don't think so.

Were water supplies and sewage disposal adequate?

I would say so. You mean in the plant or . . . ?

I would say in the community.

Oh, I would say it was adequate.

Would you say that the local area changed at all during World War II, or not?

Oh, I think the plant was a big boost to the whole area because it brought in so many people and the people were making a lot more money than they were before.

Do you think that had an affect on the local businesses?

Oh, I do, yes. M-hm. Because people bought, and of course, a lot of things weren't available during wartime, either.

Like?

Refrigerators, stoves and thing--necessities, they weren't available . . . cars.

What if your car broke down?

Well, you'd have to get it (*chuckles*) fixed, if you could. There was a lot of things that you couldn't get during wartime.

Do you think people's morals or values changed, during World War II?

I don't think so.

What about their ideas of money and what it is to be wealthy? Do you think that changed, during World War II?

Well, I think there was more money, but I think people--well, you couldn't spend a lot of money for a lot of things, because it wasn't available. So therefore, I think a lot of people saved and put their money into War Bonds.

Was there a curfew?

No, not that I remember.

Did anyone dislike the plant, during World War II, because it made munitions?

Oh, I think there were people that were against it.

What about during Korea and Vietnam?

I think the same. I think there was people against it.

Do you remember any protests?

Yeah, I think there was protests during Vietnam War. But after all, we needed the powder. I remember--I think it was Father (*Groppy?*), in Milwaukee, they were protesters and I don't know whether they ever came to the plant or not, but they were very much against Vietnam War [*inaudible*].

How did the war and the plant affect every day life in the area, as far as availability of housing? Was there a lot of housing available?

No, not an over-supply.

And what about food?

Oh, we had plenty of food. It was limited on different things, meat and sugar and flour, but it was rationed. Gasoline was rationed, but we, at that time, you had to get tickets to get gas. But we could get gas over at the plant for transportation back and forth. So we could get all the gas that we needed just about.

Did a lot of people car pool to get to the plant?

Oh, a lot of people car pooled, an awful lot.

Were there other ways to get there?

Well, they had buses. I'm not sure whether they had buses the first operation; although, I think they did. And they transported the people. I never rode the bus, because I always car pooled with different people.

Would you say that most of the women that worked at the plant either had worked outside the home before working at the plant or not?

No, I wouldn't say so. I think a lot of them were people who had never worked out of the home before.

Do you think that a lot of them wanted to keep working after the plant was placed on standby or not?

Oh, I think quite a few would have liked to have kept working.

Did many find jobs outside the plant, after it was put on standby, or not?

I don't think a lot of them--oh, I imagine quite a few of them did, but I don't believe there was a lot of them. I think because a lot of them were working mothers and they just stayed home (*chuckles*) after the plant closed.

Well, if they did find a job, what kind of a job would they find? What kinds of things would they do?

Oh, I don't know. Probably waitress work and working in stores, and it would be quite a let down to what they had earned working at the plant, but at least it was income.

What did you do after the plant was placed on standby right away there, after World War II?

Well, let's see. I worked--I was trying to think. I think I worked in a filling station and different jobs that were nothing too great (*chuckles*), but at least it was something.

Did you have to take a pay cut?

Oh, definitely, yeah. Yeah.

What about the minorities? Did they find jobs outside the plant, after it was placed on standby?

I think a lot of them went back to where they came from.

All the newcomers that came in here, did they go back to where they came . . . ?

I think a lot of them went back to their former locations, maybe former jobs, even.

Were there any labor shortages, at any time, at the plant, that you remember?

I don't really remember of any shortage of labor. There might have been, but I don't recall of any.

Do you know of any controversies in the community about who the plant hired or who the plant didn't hire based on like if they didn't hire farm workers or if they wouldn't hire certain minorities or if they wouldn't hire older people?

I don't think there was any problem that way, because there was all types of--there were young and old, and I think they were just glad (*chuckles*) to get the help.

Did many people lose their jobs at the end of World War II?

At the plant? Oh, yeah.

Who stayed on and who left right away?

Like I said before, there was quite a few people left to put the plant in standby, and then the administrative people were on, and in fact they're still on, a lot of them. (*Chuckles*).

Did the community change after the war ended?

Well, not really, I don't think.

(end of side 1; beginning side 2)

Today is Thursday, February 17th, 1995. This is Deborah Crown, and I'm interviewing Howard Rittman. This is Side 2.

Do you think that the presence of the plant made the war a more real event to local citizens or not? Do you think that the feeling in the community would have been the same, regarding the war, if the plant wouldn't have been here?

Well, I think the plant had a bearing on the feeling toward the war, because people were willing to help at the plant and do what they could to help the war effort.

After years of every day working at the plant and working for the war effort, did you miss the war when it was over?

I was glad to see the end, (*chuckles*) even though it meant a change in your lifestyle, and the earning power you had. I was still glad to see the war end.

What was it like to go back to every day life, during reconversion to peacetime?

I don't know. I think it was one of the adjustments you had to make, but it was still a good feeling that you had done something worthwhile for the war effort.

After World War II, what kind of a role did you originally expect the plant to have in the community from then on?

Well, I didn't think that it would be open and continue as long as it has.

So were you surprised that it still . . . ?

Well, yes. I don't know. It just didn't seem like it would be open this long and be re-doing things and keeping it on a standby situation.

What kind of an affect does the plant presently have on this area?

Well, I think people have pretty much forgotten about the plant (*chuckles*) being there, really, except for some of the workers that still are there, but I know they've had some problems over there with water contamination and things, but other than that, I don't know if it's even thought about hardly.

Do many people think that it should be permanently closed?

I personally do.

You do?

M-hm. I really do.

Why is that?

Well, I think it's a big waste of money. I think our government is wasting a lot of money there and I don't believe the plant will ever be used again anyway.

Do you remember the transition from construction of the plant to production, when they were sort of finishing construction and the first people were coming to work?

Well, construction was still going on when the plant was beginning to operate in some areas, because it wasn't like it was finished today, we got everything ready to go and we're going to start tomorrow. It was

just a slow transition because there was four lines--I'm not sure whether there was three or four, now--four lines for making powder and for nitrating and so forth and [inaudible] and that. There was three or four lines, and one line would be in operation first, and then they gradually got the second one and the third one and so forth.

Instead of just starting them all from the beginning?

Yeah, it wasn't just today we're going to start and the construction was completed yesterday and today we're going to start. It wasn't that way.

Was it a smooth transition, then?

Oh, yeah.

With people coming to work on that first line and then the construction still going on, it went smooth?

Yeah, m-hm. M-hm.

Tell me about the plant's safety record.

The plant had a very good safety record. They preached safety to us every week and sometimes every day you were taught safety precautions. And it was good because a lot of it you even carried on in your own home when you got home, for safety conditions that you had at your home that were unsafe, for instance, and different things that they brought up that you could use at home.

Do you recall any serious accidents there?

Oh, yeah. There was explosions.

Can you describe any of them?

Well, I remember the first explosion that I remember, I was out on Lake Wisconsin fishing with another friend of mine, and it shook the whole boat and the water and then we seen the big cloud of smoke go up, and we knew that it was an explosion. I don't know just what place it was, but one of the big buildings that contained powder, and then another one I remember was not too far from the lab. We had an explosion. That scared us of course. Everybody ran out of the building, because you didn't know whether the building was going to collapse or not, because it just shook. I think there was three that I remember. There was one out in the nitroglycerin area that blew up, too, I remember.

Were they really serious?

Oh, yeah. There were people killed in I think all of them. Not a lot of people, because a lot of people didn't work in these buildings. They were maybe two or three people in a building. So they were divided up. And of course they buildings all had barricades around them, with sand and big wooden . . .

In the nitroglycerin area?

In all the buildings. Not the labs, but any of the buildings that could blow up; so if they did blow, they'd go right straight up and they wouldn't go out.

What caused those accidents? Do you know?

I don't think it was carelessness. It was just something that--a spark from somewhere or something ignited it.

Were there a lot of minor accidents, minor problems that people had?

Not a lot, I don't think. I mean considering the amount of people that worked there. They had a hospital and nurses and a doctor was on duty at all times.

Was there one particular area of the plant that was considered more dangerous than any other area?

Oh, the nitroglycerin area was.

Could you go around to different buildings if you had to, or were you supposed to stay where you were supposed to stay?

Well, I could go--you couldn't go in some of the areas, but I was on maintenance in the laboratory, where I made solutions for the lab and I also made solutions for out in the area, in the different areas. So I was able to go almost anywhere.

Did you have a special badge for that, then, or . . . ?

Yeah. I had a starred badge, which allowed me to go out the gate, even, without permission or without a pass. And because a lot of times I had to go out to the administration building, and that gave me permission to go into other areas, too.

Were there a lot of safety instructions given to new workers?

Before they started, there was a regular class of safety before you ever even got inside the door.

Did people have to wear special clothing?

Yeah, m-hm.

Like what did they wear?

Well, powder shoes, and they're steel toed, and the beginning, when we were in the acid lab in the acid area, because we went out to the area for acid samples and that, we had to wear wool shirts and wool pants.

In the summer, too?

Yeah, m-hm.

What was that for?

Well, that was for acid, because acid would not affect the wool as much as some other clothes. But then in other years, they kind of got away from that. Although the people that worked in the area--we in the lab didn't have to wear them. We wore lab coats that were more or less acid proof, rather than having to wear wool clothes.

Did you wear any . . . ?

Oh, goggles. We had to wear goggles whenever we were out in the area.

Did you wear anything on your head?

No.

Did you ever hear about anybody in the community ever not feeling safe because the plant was there, regarding maybe a blow up [inaudible] or chemicals?

Yeah, I think people were quite concerned. Especially after that one place blew up, they were kind of concerned about it. But really it wouldn't affect anybody's [inaudible] (chuckles).

Are there any other things that you remember about working there that most people wouldn't know? Any stories that you can tell about working there, anything you remember?

Well, I know one time I got acid in my eye.

What'd you do? How did that happen?

Well, every first of the month we had to take inventory of the tanks out in the--I was out on the line tanks on one of the lines. And we had to take samples, and then we put the acid into a graduate, and then poured it into a bottle. And I had rubber gloves on, of course, and we'd dip this graduate down into the acid and get the sample out, and then we had our rubber gloves, and we'd pour it into the bottle. Well, this one time the graduate slipped in my rubber gloves because there was acid on them and they were slippery, and the graduate hit the wood floor and the acids flew up into my eye.

Even though you were wearing goggles?

I had glasses on, not goggles. And so I was taken into the hospital by ambulance and also taken to Madison, and my eye was examined down in the doctor's in Madison. But that was quite an experience, and it was very sore for about a week. I didn't go back to work for over a week. But I still, when I have my eyes examined, which it's my left eye that it got in, my eye doctor can tell where that--it had burnt the white of my eye, but if it had gotten into the center of my eye, why, I'd have lost my sight on it. That's the worst experience I had. (Laughs).

And yet you still went back there?

Yeah, I still went back. (Chuckles).

Well, are there any other things that you can remember that you can tell about, any other experiences that most people wouldn't know?

Nothing really that I can remember. Like I say, it's a long time ago. (Laughing).

(End of Interview)

APPENDIX A
RELEASE FORMS

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

NAME Floyd D. Allen
ADDRESS 509 6th St
Baraboo, Wis 53913
PHONE 608 356-3792

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2/14/95
Date

Date

Floyd D. Allen
Interviewee

Interviewee

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

NAME Carolyn Bohnsack
ADDRESS 875 Phillips Blvd.
Sauk City, WI 53583
PHONE (608) 643-3039
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Date

Carolyn Bohnsack
Interviewee

Interviewee

RELEASE FORMS
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

NAME Ms Verna M. Hackett

ADDRESS 317 5th Ave

Baraboo WI 53913-2024

PHONE (608) 356-6743

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Date

Verna M. Hackett
Interviewee

Interviewee

RELEASE FORMS
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

NAME Elroy Hirsch
ADDRESS 50 OAK CREEK TRAIL
MADISON, WISCONSIN 53717
PHONE ⁽⁶⁰⁸⁾ 228-6054

TAPE NUMBERS:

6

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Date

Elroy Hirsch
Interviewee

Interviewee

RELEASE FORMS
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NAME W. Roth E. Trueger
ADDRESS 122 Rosemary Ln
West Barraboo, WI 53913
PHONE ⁽⁶⁰⁸⁾ 356-4204

TAPE NUMBERS: 5

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Date

W. Roth E. Trueger
Interviewee

Interviewee

RELEASE FORMS
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

NAME Howard Rittmann

ADDRESS 418 E Cook ST

Portage Wis 53901

PHONE 608-742-2559

TAPE NUMBERS: 4

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Date

Howard Rittmann
Interviewee

Interviewee